CARTESIAN WOMEN

Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime

ERICA HARTH

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OF RATIONAL DISCOURSE
IN THE OLD REGIME

Erica Harth

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To The Bunting Institute
and all my Sister Fellows

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Acknowledgments

At the outset of this project several years ago I was puzzled by the lack of source material in the collections of the Harvard libraries, where I did the greater part of my research. Works by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women, even texts well known in their time, were often nowhere to be found in the United States. Research at Harvard for my last book had turned up seemingly far more uncanonical and obscure items. It didn't take me long to realize that gender made all the difference, for the items I had successfully located before were by men. Travel to France, a normal part of this type of project, was on my agenda in any event, but I decided to do what I could to remedy the situation at one of North America's major research libraries. Thanks to the graciousness of Assunta Pisani and the generosity of Harvard's Collection Development Department at the Widener Library, many of the titles cited in these pages can now be found on microfilm in the Harvard libraries. My experience is of course not unique; ferreting out long-neglected sources is one of the pleasures and frustrations of feminist scholars, particularly those who specialize in the early modern period. Librarians on both sides of the Atlantic spared me incalculable time and effort and provided precious information. At the Widener and Houghton libraries of Harvard University and at the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, and the Bibliothèque du Sénat in Paris, I was met with unfailing help and patience. I am especially grateful to Marion Schoon, Barbara Daims, and Charles Montalbano at the Widener and Madeleine Colomb at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

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ERICA HARTH

Cambridge, Massachusetts

A Note on Translation and Orthography

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the French are my own. In several instances I have chosen not to use existing translations from the original French into English because points I wished to make would have been lost in a less literal version. My translations of French verse are strictly prosaic and should not be mistaken for efforts at poetic rendition. In French references, I have kept the early modern French orthography, except in cases where confusion might arise.

Cartesian Women

Introduction: Toward a New Cogito

Throughout the history of Western discourse, women have left the mark of gender on their words. Men, following the lead of women, have only recently begun with noticeable frequency to write as gendered subjects. As is generally the case with dominant and subordinate groups, the imbalance has most often been registered in the language of the subordinate side. I am not thinking of treatises on sexual inequality or "defenses of women," which have been penned by men and women alike. I refer to genres of writing which are seemingly far removed from the polemics of sex and gender.

Where a binary signifying system has prevailed, the feminine has been constructed as the "marked" gender. In the oppositional pair "man/woman," "man" is both the universal human and the particular male; "woman" is a particular case of the universal. She is an inflection of the norm, as the inflected form of a noun can be said to be the "marked" complement of its uninflected, "unmarked" stem. Whether women were theorized as sexual inversions of men—the "one-sex" model, which, according to Thomas Laqueur, prevailed until roughly the late seventeenth-century—or as sexually distinct beings, the cultural standard was masculine and set by men. This binary relationship has raised a set of difficult questions in both semiotics and history. Is "woman" to be included in "man" as a subspecies, or is she rather an exception to the rule, a kind of deviation or freak? As the "marked" term, should she be considered an addition, or plus sign, to the "unmarked," a helpmate, as Eve was destined to be for Adam? Or, should she, as something less than the universal

(masculine) human, be figured instead by the minus sign?[1] The various discursive realizations of these possibilities are well known. One strain of thought, from Aristotle to Freud, viewed woman as a minus, an inferior, incomplete man. In another strain, prominent in the debates of the Renaissance *querelle des femmes*, woman was considered to be so exceptional to the masculine rule that she was thought to be a monster.[2] The sentimentalized view of the family, which in France dates from the eighteenth century, saw the wife as her husband's moral plus, his "better half" (but his mental inferior).

The binary semiotics of gender point to a paradox. Although Western history has largely omitted women from its annals, as titles of recent feminist works such as *Hidden from History* and *Becoming Visible* suggest, in discursive practice the feminine gender *as gender* has been only too present.[3] It has often been noted that the designation for women in early modern times, "the Sex," conferred on them a painful visibility. This expression is one of the best examples of the markedness of the feminine term. On the other hand, Roland Barthes suggests that the unmarked term can be considered the "zero degree" of an oppositional pair. It is an absence of signification (there is no masculine equivalent of "the Sex") which carries signification. It is, in the case of "man," the universal that needs no rhetorical qualifier.[4]

1. Roland Barthes summarizes various linguists' and semioticians' discussions of markedness in his *Elements of Semiology*. See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 76–78.

2. A good source for these views of women is Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). On the discursive development of sexual dimorphism from the "one-sex" model, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). As Laqueur is careful to emphasize, echoes of the old one-sex model persisted into modern times. They are surely heard in some of the episodes of literary cross-dressing that I discuss in this book.

3. I refer to Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: Rediscovering Women in History from the 17th Century to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1974); Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, Susan Stuard, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 2d. ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

4. On the "zero degree," see Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, 77–78. For a summary of the debates on the dialectic of same and Other as it relates to gender, especially in recent French feminist theory, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1–34. Butler's highly important discussion moves these debates beyond the binarism of gender to a consideration of the masculinist construction of binary discourse itself. My treatment of binary discourse in this book presupposes the masculinist discursive frame of early modern Europe, which is still largely in place.

Intellectual women in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France confronted a historically specific form of the paradox of (in)visibility.[5] Descartes's philosophy was the first in France to attract a wide lay public of educated men and women. It was instrumental in creating the complex of assumptions structuring modern rational discourse: reason as the source for knowledge of the world, the ultimate arbiter of truth in practical affairs and the sine qua non for the progressive betterment of humanity (the rationalist bias), the knower as isolated individual rather than participant in a culture, class, or social group rooted in history (what has been called "epistemological individualism"), knowledge as based on simple, certain truths (foundationalism). A universalism that denies differences among knowers links these features together.[6] A major source of Descartes's initial appeal was the apparent universality of his message that his rules and method for discovering truth could be used by anyone, of either sex. His dualist separation of mind and body strengthened the Augustinian concept of mind as a place "where there is no sex."[7] For educated, upper-class women, his philosophy was like a university without walls. In a moment of intellectual ferment across Europe, it opened up for them a possibility of philosophical discussion with men that was previously denied them. Yet markedness intervened. Women were not admitted to the Parisian academies, which were among the most powerful institutions to shape the new discourse. The educated woman was accepted, on a limited basis, in only the most restricted circles; in general, she was marked by her deviance from standards of gendered behavior. How, then, did the particular, the special case, use the discourse of the universal?

5. Joan Scott dates the historical tension between women as particular and men as universal from the early modern period. "The abstract rights-bearing individual who came into being as the focus of liberal political debate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries somehow became embodied in male form and it is his-story that historians have largely told." Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 25.

6. For a succinct summary of the features of this Cartesian discursive complex, see Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, eds., *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 3.

7. As quoted in Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 31. See 28–33 for a discussion of reason and gender in the writings of Augustine. See also her section on Descartes, 38–50. She comments, 49–50, that ultimately Descartes's concept of Reason produced a new gendered division of consciousness: "pure," abstract (masculine) reason, and practical (feminine) emotion. I am grateful to Amélie O. Rorty for recommending this indispensable book to me.

This question defines the problematics of gender and discourse which will be explored in the following pages. Dorinda Outram has commented, with respect to the French Revolution, on the ambiguous value of universalist discourse for women. It "may be necessary, but it is also inefficient and dangerous." The danger is that in the case of men and women the interests of the particular not only do not coincide with those of the universal, but almost inevitably collide with them. The necessity of universalist discourse for early modern French women was that, after a certain time, it was the only one available. Moreover, it was advantageous for women to adopt a discourse that positioned them on the side of power. As Outram has said, "discourses which *appear* to be universalistic can be seen as a way of avoiding the problem for the female speaker, because they often offer an automatic authority and validation."[8]

Because Descartes made his appearance at a time of profound shift in discursive paradigm (in the Kuhnian sense), his philosophy circulated in the unsettled atmosphere of transition. It was in large part through the critical reception of Descartes that the foundations of modern discourse—science, objectivity, and reason—were laid. Women entered the scene of debate and discussion through the salon, a terrain prepared for them since the sixteenth century. Initially, it seemed that within this intellectual space they, along with men, would be active participants in the construction of the new paradigm. The term *cartésienne* (woman Cartesian) quickly became incorporated into the language of polite, educated society.

The very word *cartésienne*, however, belies the notion of male and female intellectual equality at this juncture. In English, "woman Cartesian," with its accent on gender, translates very clearly the historical asymmetry concealed by the French pair "cartésien"/"cartésienne." Cartésiens could, as the universal masculine, include women, but in common seventeenth-century parlance the term referred to men who had gained recognition as disciples or interpreters of Descartes—men such as Nicolas de Malebranche, Jacques Rohault, Géraud de Cordemoy, Claude Clerselier, or Pierre-Sylvain Régis, to name only a few.

8. Dorinda Outram, "*Le Langage mâle de la vertu*: Women and the Discourse of the French Revolution," in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 122, 131. Joan Scott has said of Olympe de Gouges and other Revolutionary feminists that theirs was "an ambiguous discourse which both confirmed and challenged prevailing views." Joan Wallach Scott, "French Feminists and the Rights of 'Man': Olympe de Gouges's Declarations," *History Workshop* 28 (Autumn 1989): 17.

By midcentury, *cartésienne*, literally a female disciple of Descartes, had come to signify the hostess of a salon where Cartesian philosophy was discussed, or else a woman so learned as to be capable of understanding Descartes. The sparse writing left by cartésiennes, some of which I discuss in Chapter 2, parallels that of cartésiens neither in quantity nor in genre.

An examination of the sites on which intellectual discussion took place, which I undertake in Chapter 1, reveals a further asymmetry. The salon, by the very conditions of its existence, slated women for a subordinate, and finally a negligible, role in discursive development. Inescapably tied to the history of the official academies, the salon as a center of intellectual life was soon overshadowed by its masculine counterpart. And whereas men frequented both the salon and the academy, women were confined to the salon.

I have adopted the loose translation "Cartesian women" (rather than "women Cartesians," which will be signified by the French *cartésiennes*) to denote yet a further and a more profound asymmetry between the women and men who people the pages of this book.[9] From the earliest days of their interest in Cartesian philosophy, the cartésiennes marked their words with a consciousness of their gender and of gender relations. Given their anomalous situation as women in the world of letters, such markings are only too understandable. What is of interest is the relation of their words to the development of the new discursive paradigm. In the earlier period of discursive formation, from the 1640s to the 1670s, the women I discuss offered an unsystematized critique of Cartesian rationality. Later on, and increasingly after 1666, when the Académie Royale des Sciences was founded, the critique became muted. In the early days of the paradigm shift, when the hegemony of the older discourse was being challenged, it seemed that there would be room for competing particularisms. But as the Cartesian discursive formation was consolidated, its universalizing embrace was widened. To be Cartesians, as time went on, women had to speak in the universal (masculine) idiom. The result is the uneasy relationship my title is meant to convey. This

9. I will use "cartésiennes," especially in Chapter 2, to refer to those women labeled as such by their contemporaries, who evidently thought of them as followers or disciples of Descartes. "Cartésiennes" can be translated either as "women Cartesians" or as "Cartesian women." In the narrower historical context in which I use the original French, the correct translation is "women Cartesians." For references to Cartesianism in the works of seventeenth-century English feminists, see Hilda Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

book is not an introduction to all the women who displayed an interest in Descartes (I have omitted, for example, Queen Christina of Sweden), but is rather an exploration of a discursive relation. The Cartesian woman, from the early seventeenth century through the eighteenth, spoke as both a rational "Modern" and as a woman. From the particular position of the marked feminine, she struggled with the invisibility of the unmarked, masculine universal. Even in the eighteenth century, when her contestation became increasingly absorbed in the triumph of the new discourse, her words were marked by the tension of gender.

From one perspective, there is nothing in the critical stance of the Cartesian woman that is inconsistent with Descartes. As Michel Delon has observed, the spirit of critical inquiry which inhered in Descartes's project was one of its most enduring features.[10] To question and to criticize Descartes was after all to be a good Cartesian. Viewed in the *longue durée* of discursive history, however, the Cartesian legacy contributed heavily to a totalizing rational discourse of abstract universality and objectivity from which women by the historical contingencies of their gender became excluded. It is not, then, simply that they took issue with Descartes on specific points. Such was the case, as Delon points out, with many cartésiens. It is that, as women, they were differently situated with respect to the discursive paradigm that rose to dominance in the "age of Enlightenment."

It is tempting to think of the Cartesian women as speaking what Richard Rorty has called "abnormal discourse" in contradistinction to "normal" masculine discourse.[11] Such a formulation would ignore, however, the historical conditions of paradigm formation. In the first half of the seventeenth century, it can be argued, there was no "normal discourse" with agreed-upon terms of discussion. Educated women and men alike faced the uncertainties of discursive change.

The age of Descartes witnessed the displacement of an older discourse of "resemblance" or "patterning" by one of ordered analysis. Michel Foucault describes the older system as one in which "signatures" on the things of this universe made legible the resemblances

10. See Michel Delon, "Cartésianisme(s) et féminisme(s)," *Europe* 56 (October 1978): 73–86. He makes a useful distinction between "explicit Cartesianism," or adoption of Cartesian ideas, and "implicit Cartesianism," or adoption of the critical spirit.

11. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 320–33. Rorty is glossing Thomas Kuhn's distinction between "normal" and "revolutionary" science. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

linking them to one another and to human beings. Language was encoded in decipherable things. In the new "Classical" discourse (Foucault's term), or "analytico-referentiality" (Timothy J. Reiss's term), the sign no longer resided in the thing, awaiting human discovery. The very condition of the sign's existence was human knowledge. This new sign had transparently to represent the object to which it referred. Reiss characterizes the transition as one from "a discursive *exchange within* the world to the expression of knowledge as a reasoning *practice upon* the world."[12] In the new paradigm, the human knower no longer simply cohabits the universe along with everything else that constitutes it but rather seizes it as an object of cognition. As images of seizure and possession in many of the writings of the time suggest, there is an element of violence in this gesture toward mastery.[13] The split between the observer and the observable world results in the establishment of an "objective" discourse in which the individual knower's conscious assumption of the subjective conditions of cognition (what Reiss calls "responsibility of enunciation") is lost. As Reiss says, "The assumption of objectivity and the consequent exclusion of whatever cannot be brought to fit its order are necessarily accompanied by the occultation of the enunciating subject *as discursive activity* and, therefore, of its responsibility for the status of the objects of which it speaks: Galileo's *I* becomes Descartes's *we* and the objectivity of 'common speech' from Locke to Lavoisier."[14]

The discursive shift from resemblance to objective analysis altered the nature of truth. In the older system, truth was necessarily metaphorical and analogical. Foucault's example of aconite, or monkshood, illustrates the encoding of truth in a pattern of similitude. Aconite's "signature," or mark of analogy with the human, consists of seeds resembling the human eye, which inform us that the plant cures eye disease.[15] The new discourse, which eliminates the

12. Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 30. "Resemblance" is Foucault's term; "patterning" is Reiss's. For Foucault's ideas, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1973), 17–77.

13. Reiss comments (*Discourse of Modernism*, 34) that the "terms used by Galileo to describe the scientist's acquisition of knowledge are always those of violence." Carolyn Merchant explores sexual imagery of the violent conquest of nature in her *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 164–72.

14. Reiss, *Discourse of Modernism*, 42.

15. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 27–28.

mediation of resemblance, brings word and thing into line. Truth is now the adequation of the concept to the thing (referent). The thing loses its signature, and "aconite" becomes a transparent taxonomic sign signifying a plant of the genus Aconitum. The new system does not dispense with metaphor and analogy. Indeed, Alice Stroup has shown that a new type of analogical reasoning, distinct from the older nexus of sympathies and antipathies, informed the thinking of the early years of the Académie Royale des Sciences.[16] As a new discursive paradigm evolves dialectically from an older one, features of the earlier discourse persist indefinitely in the formation that displaces it.[17]

Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (1637) oriented the discursive transition from resemblance to objective analysis toward an unmasking of the old paradigm as "error" or "illusion." Foucault says of the "Cartesian critique of resemblance" that it "is Classical thought excluding resemblance as the fundamental experience and primary form of knowledge, denouncing it as a confused mixture."[18] Sylvie Romanowski has shown that Descartes wrote "as much *for* a philosophy as *against* error." Error, or illusion, is the necessary complement to Cartesian truth.[19] "Methodical doubt" cements the symbiotic relationship of truth and error. The campaign against error, or "prejudice," was of the highest interest to women familiar with Descartes's work. As Delon has argued, Descartes's program of demystification differed radically from earlier ones, for it was directed not at *opinion*, or popular error, but at the Aristotelian and scholastic intellectual tradition.[20] This program, then, could liberate women from the traditional philosophy's errors and prejudices with respect to their sex.

In its renewal of the theme "the mind has no sex," Cartesian dualism lent support to a feminist project of enlightenment. Although Descartes did not directly address the issue of women, his distinction between mind and body carried the implication that earlier sex-linked theories of mind and soul belonged to the category of error. At the

16. Alice Stroup, *A Company of Scientists: Botany, Patronage, and Community at the Seventeenth-Century Parisian Royal Academy of Sciences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 117–44.

17. My thinking on discursive change is closer to Reiss's than it is to Foucault's or Kuhn's.

18. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 52.

19. Sylvie Romanowski, *L'Illusion chez Descartes: La Structure du discours cartésien* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974), 17. See also 186.

20. Delon, "Cartésianisme(s)," 76–79.

same time, his affirmation that *bon sens* belongs to everyone constructed a positive ground for the assertion of sexual equality. Cartesian rationalism, however, opened up a discursive trap. If an identical disembodied mind in men and women alike is made to be the principle of sexual equality, what can be made of embodied difference?[21] The standard response of the seventeenth-century cartésiennes (with the exception of Elisabeth of Bohemia) was to suppress awareness of their sexed bodies. By the mid-eighteenth century this strategy no longer worked to women's advantage (if it ever did). The conjunction of such factors as materialism, sensationalism, and the culture of the Regency produced a new awareness of sexuality.[22] By this time, also, and not incidentally, educated women had been made to see that bodily difference counted more than disembodied mind in the distribution of intellectual privileges such as membership in academies and access to public forums. As I show in Chapter 3, one result of the rationalist reduction of equality to intellectual identity was women's simultaneous absorption into and exclusion from a universalizing, sex-neutral rational discourse.

By the eighteenth century, this discourse had become historically masculine. Its field was now the province of men: the academy, the club, the café, the journal. The salon was nominally presided over by a woman, but it nurtured and featured male intellectual stars. Scientific inquiry, a pursuit officially monopolized by men, had become the discursive model of truth.[23] At the same time, the universalist message of objective discourse was politicized by militant philosophes eager to establish the natural equality of "man." What became a revolutionary discourse of abstract rights eventuated in a political practice that denied women the prerogatives of citizenship. Enlightenment discourse embroiled the women whose writings I examine in Chapter 4 in new forms of the contradictions that had plagued their seventeenth-century predecessors. The eighteenth-century women joined the philosophic campaign to eradicate "prejudice," but when it came

21. Delon mentions this problem ("Cartésianisme(s)," 83–84), which Joan Scott discusses in *Gender and the Politics of History* and elsewhere. In Paul Hoffmann's reading of Descartes, the philosopher laid the theoretical foundation for sexual equality, but not for identity. See Paul Hoffmann, *La Femme dans la pensée des lumières* (Paris: Ophrys, 1977), 59–61.

22. Cf. Delon, "Cartésianisme(s)," 81–86.

23. Cf. Reiss, *Discourse of Modernism*, 40. Jane Flax, in her discussion of the Enlightenment's discursive legacy, identifies science as a central and paradigmatic feature. See Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 42.

to their own bodies they hesitated. To reformulate equality on the basis of difference rather than on that of identity would mean to lose the rationalist advantage of sex-neutral mind. Yet these women also wanted to affirm their sexuality and to ground on it the rights they saw as due their sex.

Of the women writers who figure in this book, perhaps only Olympe de Gouges (the least Cartesian, in the strict sense, of the lot) can qualify as a feminist according to late twentieth-century standards. I use the noun (chiefly in Chapter 4) to designate someone who claims equality of rights for men and women. In Chapter 2 I use the adjective, in a less historical sense, to describe discursive possibilities that have only begun to be explored by today's feminists. This "feminist alternative," as I call it, to rational objectivity repositions the knower in her relation to the object of cognition. Responsible, in Reiss's terms, for her enunciation, the knower does not lose sight of the personal, ethical, and social conditions of her knowledge. In this respect, the participation of the seventeenth-century Cartesian women in the critical enterprise of constructing rational discourse was not unlike the "feminist standpoint" epistemologies recently discussed by Sandra Harding and Nancy Hartsock, among others.[24] For Harding, "a feminist epistemological standpoint is an interested social location ('interested' in the sense of 'engaged,' not 'biased'), the conditions for which bestow upon its occupants scientific and epistemic advantage."[25] The feminist standpoint is a position of social commitment that contrasts with the supposedly value-free, objective knowledge central to the legacy of the Enlightenment. In standpoint epistemology, the social conditions of the knower and the values derived from those conditions are not concealed but are incorporated into knowledge.

The seventeenth-century cartésiennes had no self-consciously elaborated epistemology. They spoke, however, with an awareness of the

24. See, for example, Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 136–62; and Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specificially Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983), 283–310. Sandra Harding has further elaborated on standpoint theory in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). For another recent discussion of gender and epistemology, see Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

25. Harding, *Science Question*, 148.

ways in which gender mediates discourse. The critique of objectivity sketched in their writings proceeds from an affirmation of themselves both as women and as thinking subjects, a conjunction denied or unrecognized by the greater part of their intellectual world. Gender—the primary category of their social difference, as they perceived it—was experienced by the cartésiennes as a connection to, rather than an interference with, the object of rational inquiry. Moreover, the affirmation of themselves as thinking subjects was an affirmation of value. For them, the social value of the thinking subject and the social valuations attached to gendered subjects were an integral part of the search for facts.

Because of the empirically close relation of fact and value in their lives, and perhaps also because of their traditional loyalties to the church, moral and ethical concerns were uppermost in the minds of the early Cartesian women. Significantly, Descartes's most important work in moral reasoning was developed in his epistolary dialogues with a woman, Elisabeth of Bohemia. Michèle Le Deouff has commented that until the end of the nineteenth century Descartes's ethical thought was of little interest to critics.[26] Such was not the case with the seventeenth-century cartésiennes, for whom morality and "science" (a science that was under construction) were not separable.

Cartesian rational discourse in its formative phase (through roughly the seventeenth century) did not claim to be entirely value-free. In her rereading of what critics have called Descartes's "provisional morality" (morale provisoire), Le Doeuff contends that Descartes's moral thought was not simply tacked on to his theory but was related to it in complex, contradictory ways. Nevertheless, the new discourse moved rapidly toward the construction of a scientific objectivity that Helen Longino defines as twofold: (1) "scientific realism," or the "claim that the view provided by science is an accurate description of the facts of the natural world as they are" and (2) the claim that the "view provided by science is one achieved by reliance upon nonarbitrary and nonsubjective criteria for developing, accepting, and rejecting the hypotheses and theories that make up the view."[27] Rationalist objectivity, then, rests on truth claims about both

26. Michèle Le Doeuff, "En Rouge dans la marge: L'Invention de l'objet 'morale de Descartes' et les métaphores du discours cartésien," in her *Recherches sur l'imaginaire philosophique* (Paris: Payot, 1980), 89–90.

27. Helen Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 62.

epistemology (method) and knowledge ("science"). As Longino argues, scientific objectivity separates fact from value.

During its progressive phase (through the Enlightenment), rational discourse in its struggle against prejudice or superstition, strove to find a value-free ground for scientific inquiry. Cartesian women sought to preserve the union of fact and value which lies at the heart of late twentieth-century visions of a feminist science. The endeavor of the Cartesian women was conservative but not necessarily reactionary. In an important sense, it rode the progressive wave of the new discourse in its effort to overcome the prejudice of gender by registering women's intellectuality as a value. It also sought to fuse the metaphorical and moral truths of earlier times with the new objectivity.

This attempt to integrate an older discourse into a newer one is what distinguishes the seventeenth-century feminist alternative from the current search for a feminist or "successor science." A post-Enlightenment successor science would transcend the very dualisms—mind and body, intellect and emotion, the mental and the material—that Descartes himself instituted.[28] The cartésiennes, on the other hand, were ambivalent about Descartes's dualism. They recognized in it both a liberation and a new type of subordination. Cartesian dualism brought both potential freedom from the prejudice of sex-linked mind and an effacement of value behind objective fact in a discourse whose supposed value-neutrality concealed, among other things, the bias of gender.

There are, then, continuities and discontinuities between the progressive phase of rational discourse, against and within which the Cartesian women of this book are located, and its posthegemonic phase, the vantage point from which I have written. The continuities suggest that the Cartesian women's critique had a far-reaching progressive side. Their concern to preserve the "responsibility of enunciation" is one that is central to the current project of a feminist science. In this project, any truth that does not acknowledge the social conditions of the knower is of questionable value. As the Cartesian women's feminist alternative is comprehensible only when read against a rational discourse emerging under the direction of men, so feminist science is intelligible only as an alternative to (masculinist) science. The late twentieth century is perhaps the first time since the early

28. On the current feminist project of a successor science, see Harding, *Science Question*, 142–61.

modern period that gender has become visible as a determinant in Western discursive development. Not coincidentally, we are now witnessing perhaps the most important discursive paradigm shift since the days of Descartes.

The gendered dialectic of discursive development makes an imperative of the "reading in pairs" that Nancy K. Miller has called for. She asks the literary critic to read "the literature of men's and women's writing side by side to perceive at their points of intersection the differentiated lines of a 'bi-cultural' production of the novel."[29] Behind the equality deceptively implied in her phrase, Miller sees an unequal literary relation: the eighteenth-century French and English women novelists' dissent from the dominant masculine tradition.[30] Her strategy represents one fulfillment of a program outlined earlier by Myra Jehlen. Jehlen's answer as to how feminist critics can find an Archimedean point from which to question the (masculine) Western discourse within which their own has been located is a "radical comparativism" of men's and women's literary worlds.[31] As she foresaw, to think as a feminist is to "rethink thinking itself" (95). In a pioneering article, Natalie Z. Davis proposed a reorganization of historical studies along similar lines. The feminist historian, according to her, "should be interested in the history of both women and men" and not "be working only on the subjected sex any more than an historian of class can focus exclusively on peasants."[32] The late Joan Kelly noted that the feminists of the early modern *querelle des femmes* were largely bound by the misogynist discourse they sought to combat.[33] The peculiarities of Western discourse are such that it has constituted the very subordinate groups who have wished to speak of and against it. Genevieve Lloyd observes that "rationality has been conceived as transcendence of the feminine; and the 'feminine' itself has been partly constituted by its occurrence within this structure." The very "exclusion" of the feminine from rational thought, Lloyd points out,

29. Nancy K. Miller, "Men's Reading, Women's Writing: Gender and the Rise of the Novel," *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988): 48–49.

30. Miller, "Men's Reading," 45. See also her *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

31. Myra Jehlen, "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism," reprinted from *Signs* (1981) in *The Signs Reader: Women, Gender, and Scholarship*, ed. Elizabeth Abel and Emily K. Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983): 79.

32. Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976): 90.

33. Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400–1789," *Signs* 8 (Autumn 1982): 27–28.

has not been a total separation of the masculine and the feminine, but rather a major factor in the construction of discourse on the feminine.[34]

The part played by the Cartesian women of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France in the development of rational discourse was not that of a partner in a pair (a peer), nor even necessarily that of a dissenter, although dissent does mark much of their writing. It was more like that of an uneasy aide. The discomfort is visible only in "pairs." From the seventeenth-century geography of discourse mapped by the salon and the academy to the Revolutionary and Rousseauean discourse of equality, the discursive development that is the subject of this book is a gendered relation. At times it may take the form of a relation between master and pupil, but its complexities do not generally lend themselves to such a neat schematic.[35] (Was Elisabeth Descartes's pupil, or did he learn from her?) It is the uneasiness of the relation between educated women and rational discourse which I attempt to capture in the pages that follow. This uneasiness, a mismatch between the particular and the universal, has much to teach us not only about Cartesian women, but about the dis-ease within rational discourse itself.

34. See Lloyd, *Man of Reason*, 104–6, esp. 104.

35. Michel Delon finds in Cartesian rationalist discourse from Fontenelle to Algarotti a continuing dialogue between a male master and a female pupil. See Delon, "Cartésianisme(s)," 82–83.

1

Gender and Discursive Space(s) in the Seventeenth Century

In France, modern rational discourse was elaborated in three main social sites: the salon, the academy, and the *conférence*. It is significant that of these three institutions only the salon, hosted by women, was given no name by the seventeenth century. Although I will follow customary practice in using the words salon and the derivative *salonnière* (salon woman), which is in current use in early modern studies, these terms are anachronisms. *Salon* was not applied to social gatherings until the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth century, the salon was not the interior meeting place of the gatherings which it later came to designate.[1] In the earlier period, fashionable people of both sexes met either in spaces within rooms—*alcôves, ruelles*—or in *cabinets* (studies or "closets") and *chambres*. It was Madame de Rambouillet who in her *chambre bleue* (blue room) launched the fashion of welcoming guests from a *lit de repos*, or daybed, which was a bed not for sleeping, but for receiving.[2] The chambre graced by the lit de

1. See Dena Goodman, "Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (Spring 1989): 330n., and Nicole Aronson, *Madame de Rambouillet, ou la magicienne de la chambre bleue* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 19.

2. For a discussion of these spaces, see [Antoine Baudeau], sieur de Somaize, *Le Dictionnaire des précieuses*, ed. Charles Livet, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Paris: P. Jannet, 1856), 1:xvii-xxi. Livet (xix) quotes a passage from Gui Patin which makes it clear that men too received on beds, although women more customarily did so. On Madame de Rambouillet's chambre bleue, see Emile Magne, *Voiture et les origines de l'Hôtel de Rambouillet, 1597–1635* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1911), 70–71. Women also received on four-poster beds in chambers that were less private than those in which they actually slept. See Peter Thornton, *Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France, and Holland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 149–74; 210–17, 293–96. I am very grateful to Sheila ffolliott for this reference.

repos was a more intimate space than that of a salon, which according to Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* (1690), was where ambassadors were received. In contrast, the standard location of an informal academy was a library. The original setting of the Cabinet Du Puy, a circle of male scholars and humanists under the direction of the brothers Pierre and Jacques Du Puy which met from 1617 to 1661, was the magnificent library of Jacques-Auguste de Thou. In 1645, with the appointment of Pierre Du Puy to the post of *intendant de la Bibliothèque du Roi*, the meetings were transferred to the king's library on the rue de la Harpe.

The conférence (public discussion, debate, or lecture) was a larger operation than either the salon or the academy. In effect it was an academy open to a wider public. Théophraste Renaudot did for the conférence what Madame de Rambouillet did for the salon in setting a precedent for discursive space. His Maison du Grand Coq on the Ile de la Cité in the heart of Paris housed not only his weekly Conférences (1633 to 1642), but also his Bureau d'Adresse, or center for job referrals and other services, the presses for his newspaper, the *Gazette*, and his own living quarters. Up to one hundred people could be seated in the *grande salle* where the Conférences were held and where there were also periodic auctions and facilities for public medical consultations.[3]

The boundaries of the salon, the academy, and the conférence as gendered spaces were not always clear. The salon was generally a mixed group, presided over by a woman, and the academy was generally an all-male group presided over by a man. (Some foreign and provincial academies did admit women, but they seem to have had little cultural influence at a time when it was Paris that led the way.) Certain salons, however, claimed status as academies, and so crossed the lines of gender. Conférences, run by men, sometimes had a mixed audience, and were occasionally tailored for a female public, but most often involved an all-male group. Women may have attended Renaudot's conférences, and they were admitted as spectators but not as participants to the conférences académiques of Jean de Richesource, which were viewed by some as a continuation of Renaudot's. (Richesource had been a habitué of the conférences at the Bureau d'Adresse.)[4] Richesource held public conférences three after-

3. Howard M. Solomon, *Public Welfare, Science, and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century France: The Innovations of Théophraste Renaudot* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 55–56.

4. Ibid., 81n.

noons a week and gave private lessons in eloquence every morning at his academy on the Place Dauphine.[5] Some women attended conférences given by the Cartesian Pierre-Sylvain Régis in Toulouse in 1665. At about the same time, another prominent Cartesian, Jacques Rohault, opened his lectures in Paris to women.[6]

The physical spaces within which modern discourse developed, rich in cultural meanings, are a good point of departure for the prehistory of women's exclusion from this discourse. The salon and the academy entered into a gendered competition with each other for intellectual space. As it happened, the salon proved a discursive dead end for women. Feminist scholarship to date has tended to focus on the salon as a historically exceptional, feminocentric institution, and it is true that over the centuries there have been few, if any, French institutions in which women have been so central. However, when we turn the lens back to the seventeenth century and its male-dominated intellectual institutions, the salon appears in a new light.

The Bed and the Library

It is tempting to conclude from the topographical differences between the salon and the academy that the feminine space was the more private one. We will see, however, that the opposition of public/private, which is freighted with the ideology of industrial capitalism, is not strictly applicable to seventeenth-century France. Moreover, the distinction between the early salon and academy was often blurred.[7] Salon-like gatherings of men and women in the sixteenth century, such as Henri III's Académie du Palais (Palace Academy), were frequently known as academies. Sçévole de Sainte-Marthe called the circle in Poitiers presided over by Catherine des Roches and

5. [Jean (Oudart)] de Richesource, *Conférences académiques et oratoires. Sur toutes sortes de sujets problematiques, utiles & agreables, accompagnées de leur decision, ou l'on voit l'usage des plus belles maximes de la philosophie, & des plus beaux preceptes de l'éloquence* (Paris: Chez l'Autheur, à l'Academie des Orateurs, 1661–65), Advis de l'Academie. On Richesource, see Charles Jules Revillout, *Un Maître de conférences au milieu du XVIIe siècle: Jean de Soudier de Richesource* (Montpellier: [Extrait des Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences et Lettres], 1881).

6. See Wendy Gibson, *Women in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 33.

7. Daniel Roche traces the origins of the provincial academies to the salon. See Daniel Roche, *Le Siècle des lumières en province: Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680–1789*, 2 vols. (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 1:25–28; 73–74.

her mother an "Académie d'honneur."[8] This linguistic imprecision persisted into the seventeenth century. Saint-Simon called the hôtel de Rambouillet "a *kind* of academy of beaux esprits [wits]."[9] To make things even more confusing, the des Roches women and many of their seventeenth-century successors received in a *cabinet*.

Although some of these social spaces were more open than others, all were were dependent for their effectiveness on a principle of selectivity. Their elite social composition betrays links to their sixteenth-century courtly antecedents in such groups as the Académie du Palais and the circles of Marguerite de Navarre and Marguerite de Valois. Even the conférence was restricted to polite, literate society. Théophraste Renaudot, whose concern with social welfare would lead us to believe otherwise, subjected the prospective audience for his conférences to two screenings, for which he felt the need to apologize to the readers of his printed collections. Academies were not for *le vulgaire*, he said, so he admitted only persons of the "required rank" (la qualité requise). On this initial social limitation he imposed the requirements of his physical space, which could not accommodate all comers.[10] The tradition of popularized lectures destined for an upper-class audience lasted into the eighteenth century. The Musée de Monsieur founded by Pilastre de Rozier in 1782 (which later became the *Lycée*) offered courses in applied sciences, literature, and history primarily to the upper crust.[11]

Despite a certain overlap, the bed and the library were emblematic of the seventeenth-century salon and academy respectively. The bed

8. L. Clark Keating, *Studies on the Literary Salon in France, 1550–1615* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 52. For a recent discussion of the Dames des Roches, see the three essays by Anne R. Larsen: "Catherine des Roches (1542–1587): Humanism and the Learned Woman," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 8 (January 1987): 97–117; "The French Humanist Scholars: Les Dames des Roches," in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Katharina Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 232–59; "Reading/Writing and Gender in the Renaissance: The Case of Catherine des Roches (1542–1587)," *Symposium* 41 (Winter 1987–88): 292–307. On sixteenth-century academies, see also Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1947).

9. See M[aurice] Magendie, *La Politesse mondaine et les théories de l'honnêteté, en France, au XVIIe siècle, de 1600 à 1660* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925), 122n.

10. [Théophraste Renaudot], *Recueil general des questions traictees és conferences du Bureau d'adresse*, 5 vols. (Paris: G. Loyson, 1655–56), 1: "Avis au lecteur."

11. See Lucien Brunel, "Les Salons, la société, l'académie," in *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française des origines à 1900*, ed. L[ouis] Petit de Juleville (Paris: Armand Colin, 1898), 6:431–32.

(which Madame de Rambouillet probably elected to use because of her delicate health) came to define as a *ruelle* both the space for visitors between the bed and the wall, and, synecdochally, the social gatherings that we call salons. The bed evokes a feminine atmosphere of intimacy and sexuality.[12] Elizabeth Goldsmith remarks that the intimacy of the salon marked it off from the court and allowed it to function as an alternative space for the cultivation of courtly behavior.[13] One of the best known visual representations of the actual space that was called a ruelle is Abraham Bosse's engraving "Visite à l'Accouchée" (Visit to the New Mother) in which women and children are shown seated around the bed of a woman who has just given birth. The *cabinet* also evokes a certain intimacy. It was, according to Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel*, the most private (retiré) spot in the house. Often it was a small study containing some books and bibelots and perhaps had an adjacent portrait gallery.[14] The *cabinet* in which the impecunious Madeleine de Scudéry occasionally received must have been of this type. It was certainly nothing like the grandiose library from which the Cabinet Du Puy took its name. In general, contemporary descriptions of men's academies give prominence to the library. It was an essential feature of the social space in which books loaned and borrowed were consulted, written about, and discussed. *Cabinets* of *érudits* could also contain artifacts from voyages and collections of natural curiosities. The decor of the informal academy left its imprint on the official institutions. One of the functions of the eighteenth-century provincial academy was to found libraries often open to the public and always accessible to scholars.[15]

Since the informal academies generally had an all-male membership, it is not surprising that those which were made official, such as the Académie Française and the Académie des Sciences, were for men only. It is interesting that in connection with the dispute as to which informal group spawned the Académie Française, the salon of Marie le Jars de Gournay, Montaigne's "adoptive daughter," has been mentioned. Gournay's *cabinet*, with its impressive collection of books,

12. Cf. Orest Ranum, "The Refuges of Intimacy," in *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, vol. 3 of *A History of Private Life*, ed. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 220.

13. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations: The Art of Interaction in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 44–45.

14. On the *cabinet* or "closet" that was used as a study, see Thornton, *Interior Decoration*, 303–15.

15. Roche, *Siècle des lumières*, 1:124–26.

must have offered an academy-like setting. Although it is commonly accepted that Richelieu looked to the group of Valentin Conrart, the future secretary of the official academy, a proposal to admit women as members that was considered (and then rejected) by the Académie Française may have sprung from the association of a woman with a literary gathering.[16]

There was a fundamental asymmetry in this gendered construction of social life. Male academicians were frequently habitués of the salons, but there were no return invitations for their female hosts.[17] Michel de Marolles, for example, who was Marie de Gournay's good friend and neighbor and a regular of her salon, held meetings in his home of the Académie des Puristes, to which Gournay, as a woman, was not invited. Similarly, Gilles Ménage and Valentin Conrart, frequent visitors to Madeleine de Scudéry's home, each presided over an academy to which they did not invite the woman known as "Sapho."[18] The abbé d'Aubignac, who ran an important literary academy from 1654 to 1673, failed in his attempt to admit female members, although women were allowed to come to the monthly public meetings.[19]

By and large, women were unsuccessful in entering the space of the academy. Londa Schiebinger attempts to account for this failure by locating a precedent in the medieval university, from which, she claims, the seventeenth-century scientific academy derived. In France, however, the university was not the predecessor of the academy. It was precisely as an alternative to the ossified tradition of the schools that the academic movement of the seventeenth century arose. Schiebinger is right to see the Renaissance court as an ancestor of the academy. There, however, she runs into an obstacle, for the sixteenth-century court academies were mixed groups.[20] How did a historically specific sex-gender system come to permeate intellectual

16. See Marjorie H. Ilsley, *A Daughter of the Renaissance: Marie le Jars de Gournay, Her Life and Works* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963), 124, 225–31. On the proposal to admit women to the Académie Française, see *Remarques critiques sur le Dictionnaire de Bayle* (Paris: E. Ganeau; Dijon: François Desventes, 1752), 1:605–6. Cf. Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 22. I am grateful to Londa Schiebinger for sending me a manuscript copy of her book before its publication.

17. See Schiebinger, *Mind*, 30–31.

18. Schiebinger briefly tabulates this imbalance (*Mind*, 31), but only as it applies to the Académie Française. She devotes little attention to the informal men's academies.

19. Josephine de Boer, "Men's Literary Circles in Paris, 1610–1660," *PMLA* 53 (September 1938): 775.

20. Schiebinger, *Mind*, 20–21.

institutions that in the early stages of their development seemed to challenge it?

In practice, an academy had a focused educational purpose. According to Furetière, it was an "Assembly of people of letters where the Sciences [les Sciences] and fine Arts [les beaux Arts] are cultivated." The sixteenth-century academies aspired to the Platonic alliance of knowledge and virtue. Knowledge was a route to moral improvement. The aim of Henri III's Académie du Palais was to mold Henri in the form of a philosopher king.[21] Poets and humanists, men and women mingled easily in this and other aristocratic and courtly circles of the French Renaissance. The delights of poetry and music blended with the interests of humanist scholars in the pursuit of an encyclopedic knowledge that united the arts and the sciences. By the seventeenth century this encyclopedic intellectual unity had become fragmented, and informal academies began to specialize in separate branches of learning. At the same time, the functional distinction between the salon and the academy began to be apparent. The primarily educational academy served as a working group for both scholars and writers, as a clearinghouse of information, a place for communication and intellectual exchange, a setting in which poets and playwrights could test and hone their craft. The salon featured *divertissement*: all kinds of informal entertainment and especially games of wit that involved the composition of light occasional poetry and debates on questions of love. Its major literary contribution, the significance of which remained unappreciated until Joan DeJean's recent work, was the novel.[22] Nonetheless, traces of the earlier fusion between salon and academy remained. The seventeenth-century imitation of the classical aesthetic that combined pleasure and instruction informed both types of social gathering. Writers read their works in the salons where women were reputed to be the supreme arbiters of taste. And François de La Mothe le Vayer, a member of the Cabinet Du Puy, describes the delights of academic conviviality as he might the pleasures of the salon: among the "diversions necessary for the most serious study."[23] Nevertheless, the academy as a circle of regularly publishing writers and active scholars distinguished itself from the salon.

21. See Yates, *French Academies*, 7.

22. Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: The Politics of Female Authorship under the Late Ancien Régime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

23. [François de La Mothe le Vayer], *Mémorial de quelques conférences avec des personnes studieuses* (Paris: Louïs Billaine, 1669), 7–9.

"Salon writing," as Joan DeJean aptly calls the narratives that emerged from the culture of the salon, was valued by contemporaries, if at all, as entertainment. The novel was generally considered an inferior literary genre (probably because its practitioners and readers were so heavily female) and warnings about the dangers of novel-reading were legion.[24] Somaize, for example, in his burlesque comedy "Le Procez des Prétieuses" (The *Précieuses'* Trial) (1660) has the prosecutor of the précieuses file a petition to the Académie Française demanding that the women be forbidden to read Madeleine de Scudéry's *Artamène, ou Le Grand Cyrus* or any other novel under penalty of having their ruelles taken away.[25] The salon's occasional poetry, ephemeral in nature, was only sometimes gathered into *recueils*, or collections, destined mainly for initiates. In a hierarchy of literary seriousness, there was no doubt that the academy came first.[26]

The synecdoches *ruelle* and *cabinet* capture an essential distinction between the salon and the academy. The ruelle was above all a conversational space. The hostess gathered around her bed an actual circle of ladies and gentlemen that formed so many links in a chain of talk. The library that dominated the *cabinet*, by contrast, was a permanent invitation to read and to write.

The sexual division of intellectual labor involved in these social spaces cannot be convincingly mapped onto public and private spheres. Victorian "separate spheres" are not relevant to seventeenth-century French aristocrats. Male nobles did not work, and for both men and women, "home" was a space for the preservation of status through public display of rank and wealth. Both aristocratic women in the salons and their male counterparts in the academies were equally visible to their society, and both performed the "work" of consolidating the alliance of new elites. In her now classic study of salon women, Carolyn C. Lougee assumes that the salon was woman's public sphere, which took her away from her private, domestic role.[27] Lougee's view is supported by evidence from contemporary

24. See Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610–1652* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 140.

25. Somaize, "Le Procez des Pretieuses," in *Le Dictionnaire des précieuses*, 2:69.

26. See Alain Viala, *La Naissance de l'écrivain: Sociologie de la littérature à l'âge classique* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 166–67. Viala's is one of the clearest and most interesting analyses of literary academies that I've found. I have relied heavily on his discussion on pp. 15–50. My thanks to Eric Fassin for first having called Viala's work to my attention.

27. Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 11–30.

documents, in particular by her principal source for the salonnières, Antoine Baudeau de Somaize's *Dictionnaire des prétieuses* (1661). Somaize comments that at the time of "Valere" (the poet Vincent Voiture) "the kind of women called *pretieuses*, after having been in the shadows and judging verse and prose only in secret, began to do it in public."[28]

The History of Private Life, edited by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, attempts to historicize the concepts of public and private. In volume 3 of this series, *Passions of the Renaissance*, Roger Chartier notes that the early modern family could actually have been an obstacle to privacy insofar as it constrained the individual's freedom of choice in friends (and, we might add, in spouse). He makes a persuasive case for the "private" as "defined by its distance from both the *res publica* and the family order." In the same vein, Jacques Revel argues that it was the salon's freely chosen membership (and not its proximity to family life) that made it a place of privacy.[29]

Jürgen Habermas has discussed the development of a bourgeois oppositional public sphere through the press, cafés, clubs, and other institutions that mediate between the state and society. Habermas traces this development from the early formation of critical discourse in salons and cafés to the height of public oppositional discourse in the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century, bourgeois and nobles began to rub shoulders in the social institutions of the town, where polite conversation and critical debate began to fuse.[30] A full-scale "public sphere," in Habermas's terms, had yet to come into existence. Joan Landes is quite right to see the salon of the Old Regime as a "unique institution of the early modern period" rather than as an institution of the public sphere in the Habermasian sense.[31] She comments that in an era when "the interior landscape of the privatized individual subject" became more sharply defined, aristocratic architecture tended to merge public and private interior spaces.[32] In seventeenth-century usage, the "private" could mean the individual (particulier) as opposed to the larger public or civil society of which

28. Somaize, *Dictionnaire des précieuses*, 2:22.

29. Chartier, *Passions*, 400. Jacques Revel, "The Uses of Civility," in Chartier, 192–94.

30. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 27–56.

31. See Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 23.

32. Ibid., 61–62.

the individual was a part. However, the equation of public/private with the individual or the personal versus the official and institutional or professional is largely anachronistic, as Norbert Elias has shown. Elias sees the courtier as a necessarily public individual, always as it were on stage in order to conform to a "court rationality" that regulated every deed, gesture, and word in accordance with the king's wishes.[33] Christoph Strosetzki has followed Elias with an analysis of the conversations in the salons as public discourse. In his view, conversations that took place in the seeming privacy of someone's home had implications for the participants' social "career[s]" and so took on a public character.[34] This argument has much to recommend it but is undercut by contemporaries' perception of both the salon and the academy as places of refuge from the court and from absolutist ideology.

It was indeed the "public," in a narrow sense of the term, that separated the salon from the academy. "To publish" (publier) was, according to Furetière, to make something public, either in speech or in writing. Its opposite was not the "private," but rather, as we have seen in the case of Somaize, the "secret," a word frequently used at the time.[35] Furetière cites the following example of *publier*: "It is said . . . of an indiscreet person that he *publishes* the secret of his friend when he reveals it to another." The academy, where writing was central, was more "public" than the salon.[36] It gave its members instant access to the res publica of letters, a republic in which women, if admitted at all, were generally second-class citizens. Many women of the salons, if they wrote at all, did so anonymously or pseudonymously.[37] Similarly, it was not unusual for women to pursue their studies under a strict veil of secrecy and to hide their learning.

33. Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1983). See especially 110–16.

34. Christoph Strosetzki, *Rhétorique de la conversation: Sa Dimension littéraire et linguistique dans la société française du XVIIe siècle*, trans. Sabine Seubert (Paris: *Biblio* 17–20, *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 1984), esp. 212–15.

35. Cf. Chartier, *Passions*, 212.

36. Roger Chartier argues that the library and reading exemplified the private. See his essay "The Practical Impact of Writing," in ibid., 134–44.

37. Faith Beasley states that the "vast majority" of learned women in the seventeenth century signed their works, "for it was not considered completely indecent or scandalous to pick up a pen." Faith E. Beasley, *Revising Memory: Women's Fiction and Memoirs in Seventeenth-Century France* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 51. Beasley provides a quite limited sample. My impression, after consulting many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works by learned women, is that very many indeed were not signed by the author. There is much contemporary testimony, from the satires of Boileau and Molière to statements by women writers themselves (some of which I include in this book), to the effect that it was not seemly for women to parade

As early as the seventeenth century, the pen does indeed appear as a metaphorical penis, to use Gilbert's and Gubar's celebrated phrase.[38] Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss has speculated on the power of writing as an instrument of cultural and social control.[39] The writing of modern discourse in its formative period was produced by venerable male institutions: the first estate and the church, the schools, the university. Sixteenth-century humanist writers gained prestige from their association with the court and began to create an international intellectual network in the lingua franca of Latin. Power in the Bourbon court was not vested in the scholarly heirs of humanism, but letters were necessary for the glorification of the monarch. The regime relied heavily on the scholarly expertise of its historiographers, numismatists, poets, playwrights, and others whose talents were nurtured in academies. Under Louis XIV, men of science were increasingly visible on the rosters of writers important to the interests of the crown.

Most of the salonnières had little or no access to the learned writing that circulated in the academies. Even the most educated women of the day, like Madame de Sévigné, Madame de Lafayette, Madame de Sablé, Madame de la Sablière, or Mademoiselle de Scudéry, did not have the same command of classical languages and the depth of specialization possessed by the academicians, who were formed in the male educational institutions. Salonnières who were writers faced serious obstacles to publishing (publier), that is, to announcing or making public their ideas in writing. For aristocratic women, writing was a double "derogation" that contravened the code of class and of feminine modesty. Nobles who tried to make a living from writing (insofar as it was possible to do so at the time) lost status. By extension, members of the elites who aspired to noble status—robe [judicial] nobility, rich bourgeois—would not comfortably admit to being professional writers.[40]

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their knowledge, either in speech or in writing. A statistical survey of anonymous or pseudonymous works in the early modern period by men and women respectively, which is beyond the scope of this book, is badly needed.

38. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 3.

39. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques: An Anthropological Study of Primitive Societies in Brazil*, trans. John Russell (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 286–93.

40. Carla Hesse has pointed out that women were untouched by the legislation of 19 July 1793, which made the text the property of its individual author. Carla Hesse,

The patterns bed-speech-female and library-writing-male inevitably have a certain permeability. Both speech and writing were of necessity shrouded in some secrecy in the academy as well as in the salon. In an age of ubiquitous state surveillance, protective measures for both the spoken and the written word were obligatory. Richelieu, who suspected subversive activity in the salon at the hôtel de Rambouillet, tried to enlist Mme de Rambouillet as a spy. It was only through her connection to his niece, Mme de Combalet, that she was able to resist his orders.[41] Madeleine de Scudéry cautioned against spending too much time on news and gossip in salon conversations, saying that there were people who went from house to house reporting other people's news "like public spies."[42] In the salon, talk of religion and politics was taboo. Although conversation was commonly less restricted in the academy, especially in the circles of the *libertins érudits,* verbal control was exercised through a self-censorship that Alain Viala has called "euphemization."[43] Skilled in strategies to avoid violation of the censorship regulations, both salon habitués and academicians resorted to code names, metaphors, veiled allusions, well-placed silence, and other devices. Function and style coincided in the normalization of what Viala sees as "duplicity": an individually stylized bow to authority.

Signing one's work carried the risks of authority in its literal and figurative meanings. The acknowledgment of authorship could gain one entrée into prestigious Parisian literary and intellectual circles and could culminate in recognition by the king. It could also gain one entrée into the Bastille. Women who did not sign their works or who used a pseudonym worked their way around the code of gender and class. Through these means they protected themselves from the dangers of writing and often forged new identities for themselves as writers, but at the price of exchanging authentic authority for secrecy.[44]

"Reading Signatures: Female Authorship and Revolutionary Law in France, 1750–1850," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 (Spring 1989): 469–87.

41. Emile Magne, *Voiture* (1911), 148–49.

42. [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Conversations sur divers sujets,* 2 vols. (Paris: Loüis Billaine, 1680), 1:31.

43. Viala, *Naissance,* 121–22.

44. In an important article, Joan DeJean reevaluates the uses of anonymity and pseudonymity by women writers, particularly by Madame de Lafayette. Her suggestion that Lafayette's manipulation of silence and pseudonymity is a recuperation of her own authority is highly persuasive. However, the strategies that women used in order to reclaim the privileges of authorship were always devised against the ground of a prohibition. As DeJean shows, both "transparent" and "absolute" anonymity were

In an especially revealing passage, Somaize gives us an important insight into the relation of women writers to authorship. The "prétieuse," he says, must possess, or at least appear to possess, *esprit* (wit or intelligence). But are all *femmes d'esprit* "prétieuses"? No, he replies; only those who "busy themselves with writing or with correcting what others write, those who spend their time reading novels, and above all those who invent manners of speaking that are strange in their novelty and extraordinary in their meaning." The prétieuse must have a literary bent, but it is noteworthy that she is most renowned for her speech, the notorious language of *préciosité*. Her writing is quickly absorbed into the task of criticism that she performs in the salons ("correcting what others write") and into reading the work of others. In fact, he adds, these women are dependent for their reputation, if not for their very existence, on "the gentlemen who are called authors." Only in a further footnote does he admit that such dependency might be mutual: "They have to be known by the gentlemen who are called authors, and it would be difficult if not impossible to speak of them without mention of these gentlemen. Thus this book will show that not only did the authors give birth to the prétieuses, but that they serve to extend their empire and to guard their reputation, tasks which are performed reciprocally by the women and the authors."[45]

It is important to remember these hedges surrounding women's writing in the Old Regime when we try to understand the reasons for the hostility with which the salonnières were greeted. Antifeminist attacks were particularly virulent against women whose salons might be confused with academies. Because the seventeenth-century academy was a place for active engagement in men's activities—learning and writing—women intellectuals and would-be women academicians were seen as intruders into a male club. The learned Mademoiselle de Gournay, who chose to sign her works, felt the anomaly of her position so strongly that she penned a defense of women writers.[46] Although the more intellectual salons were in fact

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ultimately unsatisfying to the writer. If the writer had to use ruses to direct the reader's attention to her work, it was because knowledge of her gender would have been prejudicial. Lafayette's intermediary solution, the suppression of a signature supposedly known by readers, may have worked for her but did not solve the problem of trying to forge an authority under the restrictions of gender. See Joan DeJean, "Lafayette's Ellipses: The Privileges of Anonymity," *PMLA* 99 (October 1984): 884–902. See also Hesse, 484–86.

45. Somaize, *Dictionnaire de précieuses*, 1:23.

46. The "Apologie pour celle qui escrit," which appeared in her collection *Les*

serious rivals of the men's academies, there was something intolerable about a woman who claimed to host an academy.

Samuel Chappuzeau dramatized the tension between the salon and the academy in two plays, *Le Cercle des femmes* (1656) and *L'Académie des femmes* (1661). The tone of these plays, like that found in much male writing about the salons, is unsettled. The plays do not seem to be entirely satirical. Chappuzeau presents the *cercle*, or salon, with some sympathy in the first play, yet the later play makes it look frivolous. In *L'Académie des femmes*, a certain dignity surrounds the project of founding an academy for women, the major action of the play. Emilie's call for intellectual women to organize is linked to a view of the academy as yet another institutionalization of male power: "They [men] make a place for themselves in Senates, Academies,/ Courts, Diets, Counsels. We alone are asleep,/ We alone, on the verge of being overwhelmed,/ Have no idea that it is time to convene" (III.3.741–44).[47]

Marie le Jars de Gournay, whose very academic salon included some of the most distinguished men of the early part of the century, suffered ridicule that ranged from verbal slurs to nasty practical jokes. Charlotte des Ursins, vicomtesse d'Auchy, immortalized as "Caliste" by the poet Malherbe, who scandalously mistreated her, also attracted a large share of hostility. Contemporaries saw her as a rival of Madame de Rambouillet and as a fraud who passed off as her own the *Homélies sur l'Epistre de saint Paul* (Paris, 1643), which was supposedly written by a doctor of theology named Maucors. Tallemant des Réaux described her as a vain, pretentious, ugly woman who in her old age tried to hide the fact that she was nearly blind. In fact, her salon

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Advis, ou les presens de la demoiselle de Gournay (Paris: Toussainct du Bray, 1634). On Mademoiselle de Gournay, see Mario Schiff, *La Fille d'alliance de Montaigne, Marie de Gournay* (Paris: Champion, 1910). See also Cathleen M. Bauschatz, "Marie de Gournay's 'Préface de 1595': A Critical Evaluation," *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* 3–4 (January–June 1986): 73–82, and "Marie de Gournay and the Crisis of Humanism," in *Humanism in Crisis: The Decline of the French Renaissance*, ed. Philippe Desan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991): 279–94. I am grateful to Cathleen Bauschatz for making her work available to me and for the helpful discussion we had on Gournay. The question of seventeenth-century French women's access to learning has been exhaustively treated by Linda Timmermans in her thesis, "L'Accès des femmes au savoir et à la vie intellectuelle: Le Débat des idées en France de L'Introduction à la vie dévote (1608) aux Avis d'une mère à sa fille (avant 1703) de Madame de Lambert" (Ph.D. diss., Université de Lille, 1991). I regret that I was unable to consult Timmermans's extensively documented work before this book went to press.

47. Samuel Chappuzeau, *Le Cercle des femmes et L'Académie des femmes*, ed. Joan Crow (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1983), 92.

handled the overflow from Malherbe's nearby academy, where there were only seven or eight chairs.[48] Marguerite Buffet, the author of a list of women worthies which appeared twenty-two years after d'Auchy's death in 1646, treats d'Auchy with respect. Buffet praises her learning and does not question the attribution of the *Homélies* to her.[49]

Perhaps because d'Auchy was associated with Malherbe's serious enterprise, her gatherings inspired a violent outpouring of misogyny in an exchange of letters between two members of the Académie Française, Jean Chapelain and Guez de Balzac. Chapelain felt compelled to deny rumors that he was a member of the vicomtesse's "feminine academy," which in a later letter he contemptuously referred to as a "female academy." Men do all the work there, he insisted. Balzac dismissed the "president" of the "feminine senate" as crazy and went on to say: "A long time ago I declared myself against the pedantry of the other sex and I said that I'd more gladly suffer a bearded woman than one who plays the learned lady. . . . Seriously, if I were police chief, I would send all those women packing who want to write books, those mental transvestites ['qui se travestissent par l'esprit'] who have betrayed their rank in the world." Both men deplored the fact that women passed judgment on literary works in this academy.[50] (Men commonly complained about the salonnières' role as literary critics. Jean de Segrais, for example, spoke of "those proud ruelles, where people pass such royal judgment on so many beautiful things that they scarcely understand.")[51] One wonders how

48. See Ilsley, *Daughter*, 133. On the vicomtesse d'Auchy, see: Tallemant des Réaux, *Historiettes*, ed. Antoine Adam, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 1:132–37; Emile Magne, *Voiture et l'Hôtel de Rambouillet. Les Années de gloire, 1635–1648* (Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, 1930), 53–55; Emile Colombey [Laurent], *Ruelles, salons, et cabarets: Histoire anecdotique de la littérature française* (Paris: Adolphe Delahays, 1858), 133–46; and Georges Mongrédien, "Une Rivale de la marquise de Rambouillet: La vicomtesse d'Auchy," *Mercure de France* 227 (15 April 1931): 355–80. It should be noted that Gournay did meet with some favorable reaction, for she received an irregularly paid pension from Louis XIII. See Ilsley, *Daughter*, 128.

49. Marguerite Buffet, *Traité sur les eloges des illustres sçavantes, anciennes et modernes* (Paris: Jean Cusson, 1668), 290.

50. For a passage in which Guez de Balzac rails against learned women with an interest in literary criticism, see Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, 138.

51. As quoted in Magendie, *Politesse*, 576n. Pierre-Daniel Huet contemptuously notes that "all the ruelles set themselves up as tribunals." See Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Traité de l'origine des romans*, ed. Arend Kok (Amsterdam: N. V. Swets & Zeitlinger, 1942), 169. There were many men, however, who praised women for their good judgment and looked to them for advice on literary matters. See Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, 149.

well informed Chapelain and Balzac actually were on the proceedings at the vicomtesse's home. Chapelain mentioned that the gatherings took place on Tuesday afternoons, whereas according to Balzac they occurred on Wednesdays.[52] Whatever the day, d'Auchy's activities were terminated by the archbishop of Paris, when he learned that discussions of religion in her circle sometimes deviated from orthodoxy.[53]

Other intellectual women of the seventeenth century who held or aspired to hold academies have since passed into near or total oblivion. We would like to know much more, for instance, about Madeleine de Sennecterre (dates unknown; her brother Henri was born in 1573). According to one observer of early seventeenth-century Parisian high life, ambassadors met regularly in her home. After her death, this reporter continues, the Cabinet Du Puy offered its hospitality to the ambassadors, who declined to appear in such large groups. The report gives the impression that contemporaries saw the Cabinet Du Puy as in part an extension of, or a complement to, Sennecterre's gatherings.[54] Like other learned women who lived and entertained on their own, such as Madeleine de Scudéry and Marie le Jars de Gournay, Sennecterre was a poor aristocrat, and so in need of patronage. Tallemant unkindly calls her a "natural intriguer who needed to push herself." Of her posthumously published novel (*Orasie*, 1646–48), he says that it is "not too poorly written, but she tries a little too hard to appear learned. That's the vice of most women who write." He concedes that she was intelligent and informed of all the news, but feels obliged to note that when she began to receive, she was old and ugly.[55]

Somewhat more is known about Antoinette de Salvan de Saliez (1638–1730). She was widowed early and, according to one eighteenth-century historian of illustrious women, chose not to remarry in order to pursue her studies "with greater freedom."[56] In 1689 she was admitted to the Academy of the Ricovrati in Padua. In 1704 she

52. See the exchange between Chapelain and Balzac in Jean Chapelain, *Lettres*, ed. Ph[ilippe] Tamizey de Larroque, 2 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1880–83), 1:215–16 and n. 5 on these pages. Cf. Georges Mongrédien, "Une Rivale," 377–79.

53. Tallemant, *Historiettes*, 1:135–36.

54. The report is found in [Abraham van Wicquefort's] *Mémoires touchant les ambassadeurs et les ministres publics* (Cologne: Pierre du Marteau, 1676), 430–31.

55. Tallemant, *Historiettes*, 1:88–90.

56. [Joseph de la Porte], *Histoire littéraire des femmes françoises*, 5 vols. (Paris: Lacombe, 1769), 2:113.

and Madame de Monpelliat established in her native Albi an academy they called the "Chevaliers et Chevalières de la Bonne-Foi" (Knights and Ladies of Good Faith). Some twenty years earlier, Saliez had engaged in a correspondence with Claude Charles Guyonnet de Vertron, also a member of the Ricovrati and the editor of *La Nouvelle Pandore* (1698), a compilation of women's writings. Vertron later asked to be admitted to her academy, despite his half-humorous admission that he had just fallen in love, thus violating the ban on love that Saliez wished to impose on her institution. Her novel, *La Comtesse d'Isembourg* (1678), was translated into several languages. She also authored *Les Paraphrases sur les Psaumes*, *Réflexions critiques*, and contributions to journals and recueils. Saliez conceived of her academy as a "Project for a new School of Philosophers, on behalf of Women," and she saw her mission as a war on prejudice, a feminist enlightenment. Her goal was to people her academy with a moral and intellectual elite, without regard to rank or wealth. The members were to feel free to express themselves openly. According to her, the academy was a success. Reasonable men, she said, were quite willing to be taught by women. She was disappointed to learn that sexual equality was still an issue with some people, just when she thought that it was no longer contested by *honnêtes gens*.[57]

The threat posed by the learned woman to the male academic institutions was not the only reason for men's hostility to the academic salon, but it may have been a major one. Carolyn Lougee has demonstrated that the salon was a place of social fusion for the old sword nobility, the newer robe nobility, and the bourgeois.[58] She suggests that it was the social anxiety aroused by this disturbance of the traditional orders that underpinned seventeenth-century antifeminism. Yet the question remains as to the differential treatment of male and female intellectuals. The same mixture of social groups can be found in the men's academies,[59] which did not provoke a corresponding hostility. For example, Claude Nicaise describes the Cabinet Du Puy,

57. On Antoinette Salvan de Saliez, see Léopold Collin, ed., *Lettres de Mesdames de Scudéry, de Salvan de Saliez, et de Mademoiselle Descartes* (Paris: Léopold Collin, 1806), xxxv-xxxix. For her correspondence, see 185–273. See also [Claude Charles Guyonnet de] Vertron, ed., *La Nouvelle Pandore, ou les femmes illustres du siècle de Louis le Grand*, 2 vols. (Paris: La Veuve C. Mazuel, 1698), 2:111–23; 126–71; 176–83.

58. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes*.

59. See, for example, Daniel Roche's analysis of the social background of provincial academicians, *Siècle des lumières*, 1:197–210.

of which he was a member, as being composed of Parisians and provincials, robe and sword nobility.[60] (In fact it also included bourgeois.) Of course, the principle of social selection was operative. Nicaise is careful to state that the members were all honnête gens, that is, of acceptable social status. René Pintard found that the active personnel in the circles of the libertins érudits, among which he includes the Cabinet Du Puy, was bourgeois.[61] The academies, like the salons, sought both an intellectual and a social elite. The result was an apparent widening of social life. The Protestant Henri Justel's all-male conférences drew such a diverse crowd that an English visitor commented, "Anybody who looks not like a Beggar enters."[62]

It can be argued that the social diversity of the men's circle was not as threatening as that of the mixed salon, where matrimonial alliances could easily be formed. Lougee, however, does not stress this point, but instead analyzes the social background of the husbands and fathers of salon women in order to show the intermingling of *women* of diverse social rank. She does not argue that "misalliances" were made in the salons, but rather that in its social heterogeneity the salon promoted the forging of new elites. The antifeminist writers whom she cites did grumble about the social ambition of salonnières, but it is not clear how such complaints may have related to hypergamy originating in the salon.[63] Even if we were to see the salon as a potential breeding ground of social hybrids, we could make the same claim for the academy. When Guillaume Homberg of the Académie des Sciences married the daughter of his fellow academician Denis Dodart, Fontenelle said that he married "in the Academy."[64] In the admittedly close-knit, provincial, mainly Protestant society of Castres, at least several marriages resulted from collegial connections in Paul Pellisson's academy.[65]

60. [Claude Nicaise], *Les Sirènes, ou discours sur leur forme et figure* (Paris: Jean Anisson, 1691), 4.

61. René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Boivin, 1943), 77–83.

62. As quoted in Harcourt Brown, *Scientific Organizations in Seventeenth-Century France (1620–1680)* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1934), 167.

63. For a sample of these complaints, see Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes*, 78–79.

64. Volker Kapp, "Les Qualités du scientifique et le prestige social des sciences dans les éloges académiques de Fontenelle," in *Fontenelle: Actes du colloque tenu à Rouen du 6 au 10 octobre 1987*, ed. Alain Niderst (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 447.

65. See Alain Niderst, *Madeleine de Scudéry, Paul Pellisson, et leur monde* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), 11–109.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the salon and the academy had worked out a modus vivendi. There is a certain irony to the fact that once the salon gave up its academic pretensions, it in a sense grew closer to the academy. The eighteenth-century salon was no longer strictly speaking a woman's space, for, as Marguerite Glotz and Madeleine Maire have said, "each salon revolved around an authentic or an inauthentic great man."[66] Women were the facilitators and animators of social and intellectual exchange in this masculine star system. They were also the power brokers in the scramble for academic chairs.[67] It was to their efforts that many men owed their election to the prestigious Paris academies. With this powerful informal patronage in mind, Hippolyte Taine remarked that the Académie Française became "a huge official, centralized salon."[68] The eighteenth-century salonnière was the indispensable social center of the group, but she stood outside its discourse, monitoring and protecting her flock.[69]

The ruelle and other settings for the seventeenth-century gatherings that we have come to call salons attracted their share of derision, but they were recognized as properly feminine places. The feminine academy was another matter. As a kind of salon gone wrong, it housed women who literally did not know their place. The application of the term "academy" to a few of the salons indicates that in seventeenth-century France the assignment of gender to discursive space was not yet complete. Used in this way, the term expresses the aspiration of some women to lead an intellectual life on an equal basis with men and men's fear that their aspiration might be fulfilled. This linguistic usage carves out a terrain of struggle on which the feminine salon and the masculine academy locked horns over the problem of women's minds and the development of rational discourse.

66. Marguerite Glotz and Madeleine Maire, *Salons du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1945), 20.

67. See Vera Lee, *The Reign of Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1975), 116–17.

68. As quoted in Brunel, "Salons," 425. On the patronage of eighteenth-century salon women, see also Léon Abensour, *La Femme et le féminisme avant la Révolution* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1923), 320–22, and Vera Lee, *The Reign of Women*, 116–17.

69. See Dena Goodman, "Governing the Republic of Letters: The Politics of Culture in the French Enlightenment," *History of European Ideas* 13, no. 3 (1991): 183–99.

La Prétieuse: The Value of the Feminine Word

Although the prestige of the academy was dependent on the power of writing, seventeenth-century speech and writing were still closely interrelated. Literature—especially the novel—was often close to transcribed speech. Our (written) evidence suggests unstable relations of value between the two media of expression. The abbé Bourdelot, who presided over one of the most successful and long-lived public academies of the century, left it to his scribe to capture this instability in print: "Reading without conversation makes a man savage, pedant, and awkward; conversation without reading is sterile; both reading and conversation have no effect without reflection."[70] We would like to know what people may actually have said in the salons and academies. Much can be learned, however, about the relations of speech and writing from two well-known but problematic sources: the abbé Michel de Pure's fictional exploration of the seventeenth-century salons, *La Prétieuse, ou le mystère des ruelles* (1656–58), and Madeleine de Scudéry's series of moral essays (1680–92) in the form of "conversations," some extracted from her novels and others composed afresh. Set against literature from the academies, these works pose a central question about gender and spaces of discourse: what room was there for women to participate in the intellectual life of discussion and writing? The salons were perceived above all as a foyer of civilization, a place to learn good speech and manners. The conversations of the academies set similar standards of civility. In the more academic salons, such as Madeleine de Scudéry's, serious discussions among working writers did take place. The unstable hierarchy of speech and writing ultimately settled into boundaries of rational discourse, which marked limits to its development in the salon.

In 1647, Vaugelas set an authoritative standard of excellence for the French language in *bon usage*: "It's the speech of the soundest part of the Court, in conformity with the writing of the soundest part of the Authors of the times."[71] For Vaugelas, both the court and "good authors" establish correct usage, but the speech of the court comes first: "It is not, however, that the Court does not contribute incomparably more to Usage than do Authors, nor that there is any propor-

70. *Conversations de l'Académie de Monsieur l'abbé Bourdelot* . . . recueilly par [compiled by] le Sr Le Gallois (Paris: Thomas Moette, 1672), 7.

71. Claude Favre de Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue françoise* (facs. ed. of 1647), ed. Jeanne Streicher (Paris: Droz, 1934), preface, 2:3.

tion between them; For in fact the spoken word takes first place in order and in dignity, since that which is written is only its image, as the spoken word is the image of thought" (Preface 2:5). A hierarchy of values lies behind the apparent circularity of the grammarian's reasoning, which refers us for good speech to good writers, who in turn ostensibly find their models in speech.[72] In the early days of print, when literacy rates were low and books scarce and expensive, even "high" culture was of necessity largely oral. A variant of Vaugelas's "good usage" becomes a commonplace of salon literature, the interplay of speech and writing.

De Pure's *La Prétieuse* is built on this interplay. Like so many of the long French novels of this time, *La Prétieuse* has little or no plot. It is a kind of Bildungsroman which records a protagonist's journey through the world of the salons. Although de Pure himself left no keys to his novel, his public, the very restricted society of the salons that he depicted, did have the keys. Contemporaries read the novel less for an introduction to the milieu of the précieuses, which they knew quite well, than for a commentary on themselves.

In the novel the male character Philonime, who is initiated into the feminine world of the ruelles by Agathonte, learns early that conversation reigns supreme in the salon. Agathonte takes the feminist side of a current debate on the value of women's conversation.[73] Of the salonnières she says, "One of their conversations is more useful than reading the best books, and it satisfies the mind more than Doctors' lectures."[74] By setting conversation not only against books but also against "Doctors' lectures," Agathonte doubles the opposition speech/writing with that of the salon and the academy. Because Michel de Pure was a notoriously unreliable commentator on the salons, it is difficult to assign value to the terms of this opposition. The opacity of de Pure's text obscures distinctions between irony and disinterest, between satire and approbation.[75]

72. Viala, *Naissance*, 37, sees circularity here.

73. See Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, 143–54.

74. Abbé Michel de Pure, *La Prétieuse*, ed. Emile Magne, 2 vols. (Paris: Droz, 1938–39), 1:10. Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text.

75. Sylvie Romanowski sees *La Prétieuse* as fiction rather than as document. She comments on the work's ambiguous tone of intermittent mockery. See Sylvie Romanowski, "Un Roman féministe du dix-septième siècle: Héroïsme et langage dans *La Prétieuse* de l'abbé de Pure," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1977): 461–62. Paul Hoffmann, on the other hand, reads *La Prétieuse* more as a transparent document on préciosité. Paul Hoffmann, "Préciosité et féminisme dans le roman de Michel de Pure," *Travaux de Linguistique et de Littérature* 5, no. 2 (1967): 23–34. Ian Richmond reads the

As the novel proceeds, the double opposition is layered with that of public/private. Melanire, who feels that she has been offended by Agathonte, debates about the most effective way to respond. She wonders whether she should reply in verse, in a satire, or in an "Angry Speech [Harangue], made public in print" but concludes, "it seems to me that would be carrying too far or too prominently into the public domain a private offense." Her friend Eulalie cautions her that written works are "very dangerous." "The eyes are much more stern than the ears; they go over things and crush them by dint of seeing them. Thus written things are not safe." Eulalie would opt for speaking because it's easier, "less expensive," and more persuasive. Finally, she adds the factor of gender. Conversation is the sphere of women: "The Art of speech seems to be in its element in the mouth of a beautiful person of our Sex; but we should leave the art of writing to men without envying them or wishing to imitate them. I know that this century has created Writers of both sexes and that perhaps the finest, best-received and best-selling Works have been written by persons of our own. However, as these persons are rare, admiration is due them, but imitating them is too difficult" (1:24–25).

Melanire's indecision about speaking and writing recalls one of Renaudot's conférences, "If speaking well is better than writing well." Here, as in Melanire's comment "speech" means oratory (une Harangue).[76] The "harangue" that worries Melanire was a public—and often a written—genre. Eulalie, who uses the more modest *parler* and *dire*, scales down Melanire's aspirations to the conversational level of a ruelle, which in de Pure's novel is not only not public, but is a very feminine, secret place of "mysteries," which he as a male dares to penetrate. The organizing concept of the book has sexual overtones, and so it is not surprising to find Eulalie endorsing a sexual division of linguistic activity. But the endorsement loses its force in its unresolved equivocation about women writers. Why does Eulalie want to muffle women writers, who, as she realizes, authored among the best and most successful works of the seventeenth century? De Pure sketches a gesture of repression of women's writing, an exclusion of women from the literary canon which Joan DeJean has traced through critical tradition to our own day. DeJean's argument that for the origins of the the French novel we must look to women substantiates

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novel both as a reflection of social reality and as a satire. Ian M. Richmond, *Héroïsme et galanterie: L'Abbé de Pure, témoin d'une crise (1653–1665)* (Sherbrooke, Québec: Naaman, 1977).

76. Renaudot, *Recueil*, 1:833–38.

Eulalie's assertion that women wrote perhaps the most successful works of the time.[77] De Pure's repressive gesture is even more blatant when he mentions Madeleine de Scudéry. He praises her novels, but treats them as if they were written by her brother. As Emile Magne points out, however, contemporaries were not fooled by Georges's signature. Why would de Pure want to credit Georges with the authorship of the novels? (Perhaps, as Magne suggests, de Pure's remarks on Madeleine de Scudéry's writing are an allusion to Georges's tyrannical suppression of his sister's signature.) De Pure does have his character Aracie call Madeleine de Scudéry "the Muse of our century, and the prodigy of our sex." Finally, however, it is de Scudéry's *speech* that wins the higher praise: "she can dull all the finest productions . . . by her conversation alone, for she is so good at it and so amiable that you prefer to see her than to read her." And again: "so that in comparing what you see of her, what she says in private, with what she writes . . . you prefer without hesitation her conversation to her written works" (1:141–44).

La Prétieuse seemingly follows contemporaries' idea that the domain of women was *la parole*, or speech. It has been thought that the novel satirized the idiolect of the salons, the peculiarly ornate and metaphorical language said to have been favored by the précieuses. However, in counterposing speech, the purview of the feminine salon, to writing, the purview of the masculine academy, de Pure questions not only an idiolect, but the value of speech itself, not only the précieuses, but women.

In a key passage of the novel, Philonime tries to gain some credit with the salonnières by boasting of his connections with the "Doctes" (the learned) and the *beaux esprits*. These terms meant different things to different people and could take on a positive or pejorative sense depending on the context. Philonime proudly cites a conversation he has had with two men, each of whom qualified as both docte and bel esprit according to anyone's standards—Gename (Gilles Ménage) and Parthenoïde (Jean Chapelain). Eulalie interrupts him with a request that he ask the two doctes to omit Greek and Latin from their works and write about less difficult subjects, so that they can earn respect in ruelles as well as in cabinets (1:126–27). She follows her request with an apology for the very act of speaking, denying herself the realm that de Pure had previously assigned to her: "I know that

77. Joan DeJean, "Sappho's Leap: Domesticating the Woman Writer," *L'Esprit Créateur* 25 (Summer 1985): 14–21.

my sex and my few years lend little authority to what I say, and indeed that they should prevent me from speaking." Philonime replies with an eloquent defense of the two doctes. Eulalie nevertheless persists in her request, stressing her dislike of learning: "as soon as I find some Latin, Greek, or other foreign word in my way, I am seized with disgust; the pleasure of my reading fades and loses the vivacity that intelligence fosters and that ignorance destroys" (1:128).

Now if the contrast here was to be between worldly, "Modern" salonnières and pedantic, "Ancient" academicians, Ménage and Chapelain were exactly the wrong choice. Both were among the *mondains* that Alain Viala groups among the "nouveaux doctes" (new scholars) who were more immersed in linguistic reform than in the older humanistic scholarship.[78] Instead of discrediting the two nouveaux doctes, Eulalie discredits herself and makes the salonnières look like silly, anti-intellectual women. Indeed her personal statement quickly slides into the standard denunciation of learned women as she hastens to disclaim any connection with a "grande Dame" who lectures on esoteric words in the salons (1:128). The ambiguous position of the learned women is reinforced by de Pure's portrait of the learned Didascalie, who is alternately admirable and ridiculous.

Mademoiselle de Gournay in her "Apologie pour celle qui escrit" (Defense of A Woman Writer) saw herself in a comparable plight. Either her ignorance earned her mockery from the scholars or her knowledge was laughed at by the mondains.[79] De Pure's précieuses are caught in this double bind. They had crafted their ruelles as a peculiarly feminine place, where speaking could be a counterpart to the writing of the male academy. Yet the speech that intruded into the intellectual domain reserved for men became problematic. It is as if women were allowed neither to be ignorant nor to be learned.

At the end of the first part of the novel, de Pure introduces *esprit* as what appears to be a middle term between learning and ignorance. Esprit, or natural wit, was supposed to be the particular virtue of salon women. A debate on women and learning conducted on the one side by the pedant Horacien and on the other by Philonime and Gelasire (both stand-ins for de Pure), as well as Gename (Ménage) seems to be resolved in favor of women with esprit. Although the debate begins with Horacien's fulminations against salon women who claim to judge the works of scholars, the centrality of women to

78. See Viala, *Naissance*, 15–50.
79. Gournay, *Les Advis*, 508.

the discussion is questionable. Horacien is the butt of the joke here. As a docte, and a representative of what is meant to be viewed as outworn scholasticism, he is quickly put in his place by the three nouveaux doctes. At issue is the contest between authority and the Ancients (represented by Horacien) and reason and the Moderns (represented by the three other men).

Women are merely a pawn in de Pure's version of the masculine Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns. They are invoked to support the Moderns' cause. Thus when Horacien rails against women who claim to have good ideas on their own without a knowledge of Greek and Latin sources, Gename defends natural wit by observing that Plato and Aristotle after all had original ideas. Esprit turns out to be a domain that rests on shifting sands. The nouveaux doctes cite it to support intellectual women, but only on the condition that it remain a complement to male learning. Gelasire states that he will no more forgive foolishness "in women with wit than in men with learning." (1:172), clearly delimiting separate masculine and feminine intellectual spheres. By the end of the debate, we are brought back full circle to the learned woman, and we are made to wonder what exactly feminine esprit might be. Philonime, the onetime apologist for the learned lady, aligns himself (and de Pure) with her critics in suggesting that with a little esprit, a woman will go a long way in encroaching on the masculine field of knowledge. He gives this preview of the contents of "La Prétieuse," a sly self-reference:

> You will find the kind of wit [esprit] that clever men condemn in women, wit that clever women use to confound the most learned men. You will see the ardent curiosity of the Sex and their ambition to equal ours. In a word, we put our finger on a principle that must be counted among the world's most certain: that the stupidest woman has enough wit to conceive vanity and to puff herself up beyond her worth. Here is the source of those pompous words, those extraordinary flights of imagination, that presumptuousness in judging everything—either Verses that she can't write or Prose that she can't understand—and in making speeches for which she lacks the art, in embarking on questions that she can't resolve, and, finally in reaching beyond her grasp. (1:174)

The ruelle, which houses esprit, can conserve its integrity only if it remains a separate, feminine social and intellectual space. The instant that it starts to adopt some of the conventions of the academy, it is

condemned. So when Aracie proposes "La Prétieuse" as a subject of discussion for her salon, and Eulalie seconds the idea of setting an agenda for conversations, Sophronisbe and Philonime object that prearranged discussions belong properly to the academy. The salonnières would only be ridiculed for adopting such procedures, they say. In fact, many of the academies did announce their subjects of discussion in advance of meetings. It was a standard practice of the conférences to do so. Gelasire warns that such discussions might end up in *Centuries*, the written records of Renaudot's conférences (1:211). Eulalie rescues the idea from ridicule by proposing large, general topics rather than the narrow, specialized ones of the academy. In so doing, she turns the satire to the disadvantage of the academy, which now looks constrained and dull: "For if you set yourself up to treat questions of knowledge and doctrine, and if you impose constraints on yourself, you are reduced to certain preselected and artificial comments and you lose freedom and pleasure. It's no longer a diversion, it's an occupation; it's less a conversation than a conférence. It's a pain rather than a pleasure" (1:212).

It was precisely the pleasures of freedom that the salon claimed as its advantage over the academy. The academy and the conférence prided themselves on a different kind of discursive freedom, as we shall see. On the surface, the two differing styles correspond to Richard Rorty's distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics.[80] If epistemology, in Rorty's construction of it, provides rules for reaching rational resolutions of disagreements, or the "maximum amount of common ground with others," hermeneutics abandons the assumption of a common discursive ground. Rorty evokes the image of a Socratic salon to illustrate his notion of hermeneutics as a kind of conversation: "Hermeneutics sees the relations between various discourses as those of strands in a possible conversation, a conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation lasts. This hope is not a hope for the discovery of antecedently existing common ground, but *simply* hope for agreement, or, at least, exciting and fruitful disagreement."[81] The seventeenth-century salon's conversational ideal has a strangely antifoundationalist, postmodern cast. The salon conversation purports to range improvisa-

80. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 315–22.

81. Ibid., 316–18.

tionally over a wide variety of topics and to allow for the unconstrained play of participants' minds. But because the very process of this play was in general highly regulated, and because there was prior agreement on the formal and substantive limits of the conversation, such transhistorical comparisons become moot.

In de Pure's novel, freedom signifies the abandonment of academic constraints. Gelasire, who "delights in mocking everything," who "turns with the wind" (2:139), is the very figure of freedom. He abandons all order, never follows a discussion to a close, never comes to a conclusion: "I enjoy that charming freedom of conversation which gives minds space to diversify the topics and to change the entertainment at will" (2:139). Logic and order, he says, are for books: "They're good for those who prepare formal works, perfect Books." But "conversation is born free" (2:139).

It is with some justification that Ian Maclean sees in the "freedom" of *La Prétieuse* an open-ended process of exploration. He reads other meanings in it as well: the purity of the untutored feminine mind, a Cartesian doubt and rejection of received ideas, the move for linguistic reform.[82] The value of this freedom, however, is apparent only when measured against the constraints of the academy and of writing. In de Pure's novel, relations of value between the feminine salon and the masculine academy are destabilized by the intellectual aspirations of women. Because the précieuses refused to stay in the place prescribed for them by their gender, that is, outside educated discourse, their space became a problem. If they showed too much esprit, the salon could no longer contain them and they veered dangerously toward the academy. Because of this slippage of ruelle into cabinet, of feminine into masculine space, the value of the feminine word was put into question. *La Prétieuse* by its very title centers on the problem of value: what of value did the women called précieuses have to offer? And, finally, how "precious" were the précieuses themselves?

De Pure's answer to these questions is that "la Prétieuse" is worth nothing, both as a novel and as a category of women. Much of the novel turns on a common baroque, mirror-like conceit that has a group of characters commenting on the novel, *La Prétieuse*, and deciding to judge, satirize, and embarrass les prétieuses themselves. Eri-

82. Ian Maclean, "La Voix des précieuses et les détours de l'expression," in *Présences féminines: Littérature et société au XVIIe siècle français*, ed. Ian Richmond and Constant Venesoen (Paris: *Biblio 17–36, Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature*, 1987), 57–62.

mante, a leader of this insurgent anti-précieuse group, says that he has read *La Prétieuse,* which defines the "prétieuse," but is filled with nonsense. In the book, he comes across a letter written by Gename, which is supposed to be a description of the prétieuse. This description isn't satisfactory, because according to the writer the prétieuses are "things which don't exist. He [Gename] describes beauties in idea alone, who are only phantoms imagined and fabricated by a gratuitous melancholy" (1:350–51). Erimante repeats a self-definition offered by a prétieuse: "A Prétieuse assigns a particular price to each thing, when she judges, when she praises, or when she censures." He questions his informant as to the value of the prétieuses themselves. If they *bestow* value, what do they have left for themselves? He wants to know "if they possess as much value [prix] as they give; if they're worth the price they estimate; . . . if they are *Prétieuses* [precious] in themselves, or in others; if they are like a zero, which has no value by itself but only when it is joined to a number" (1:352–53). Like the prétieuses, the title of the novel has a signifying value of zero. Erimante says that since it has no particular referent, it is emptied of signification. Without a key, which the author has not furnished, the abstraction loses its ontological foundation and is reduced to nothing: "the name of the book, *La Prétieuse,* doesn't signify a particular thing, and it doesn't belong to the person of which it speaks; rather it designates nothing" (1:356).

De Pure's ontological doubt about the précieuses is framed by a larger meditation on the commonplace opposition between words and things.[83] The signifier "la Prétieuse" dangles rootless in a mysterious no-woman's land. It is a sign without a referent, a word without a thing. When some members of the group worry that in their satire they might be guilty of slander, others offer the reassurance that each prétieuse will be "masked" and disguised by a code name (1:356). But in a discussion of enigmas, a favorite salon game, Erimante has already rejected masked words: "You should never have to guess about words; they should always carry their meaning and signification, and they should never be obscure. The word is only a garment given to the imagination in order to clothe the thought . . . but it's a garment that shouldn't cover it; it's a coiffe, not a mask" (1:343). Without immediate transparency, the word would lose its signifying value.

83. This commonplace runs throughout the novel. See, for example, 1:375–76; 2:13–17.

Under this radical ontological and linguistic investigation, both the prétieuses and their words disappear.

Domna Stanton has argued that we should view *préciosité* less as a historical phenomenon than as the fictional product of male phantasms.[84] De Pure's satire questions the existence of the prétieuses themselves, and so exiles them from a world of masculine values. In the same gesture, however, the author is obliged to nullify his own novel. Yet his novel does exist, and it tells us a story that Stanton too relates. The words spoken in the ruelles that the narrator visited were subversive. His salonnières didn't confine their talk to literature. They discussed radical alternatives to prescribed gender roles, such as trial marriage, divorce, regulated pregnancies, and parity in sexual relations. One woman asks how to change the "disorder" of marriage, how to soften "the rigor of slavery, the hard chains" (2:17). Another complains that marriage is like a special form of torture in prison: "wherever in marriage a woman turns she finds constraint" (2:32–33). These and similar remarks prompt Parthenoïde to comment that there should be laws against such talk (2:114). De Pure attempted to cancel the conversations in reducing the speakers to nothing, but in the process he left us a glimpse of the ruelle as a possible space for feminine dissent.

Signed in Invisible Ink

In making the novel the subject of a conversation that is written down in the book, *La Prétieuse* plays with the opposition speech/writing. At the same time, it seriously questions the "preciousness" of the précieuses' words. Although de Pure seems to validate the spoken word of the feminine ruelle over the written word of the masculine academy, his salonnières are perpetually in danger of overstepping their bounds. Too much esprit lands them in masculine territory. Women's writing, an inadmissible incursion into the zone of the academy, is erased. Ultimately, de Pure denies value even to women's spoken words in his intimation that the précieuses, whose self-proclaimed identity consists of giving value to words, not only are valueless but do not even exist.

84. Domna C. Stanton, "The Fiction of *Préciosité* and the Fear of Women," *Yale French Studies* 62 (Fall, 1981): 107–34.

De Pure probably had personal knowledge of Madeleine de Scudéry's circle.[85] His learned Didascalie is in many ways reminiscent of the "incomparable fille" (incomparable woman) whose Samedis, or Saturday gatherings, had gotten underway by 1653. Chapelain and Ménage, who as Parthenoïde and Gename respectively figure prominently in de Pure's cast of characters, were among de Scudéry's friends. Her five volumes of moral essays in the form of *conversations* (1680–92) give us an opportunity to see how thematic variations on speech and writing mark hesitations over the boundaries of gendered discursive space. In the *conversations*, de Scudéry writes her own paradox as one of the most celebrated salonnières and women writers of the time. As a salonnière, she remained within the sphere of speech grudgingly acknowledged as feminine; as a writer she crossed into traditionally male territory. The inscription of the salon's spoken conversations in her *conversations* is a documentation of the dilemma of her discursive space. How was she as a woman intellectual to participate in rational discourse?

De Scudéry's situation as a woman writer of modest means was at best precarious. Her gender did not permit her to avail herself of the opportunities open to men who hoped to earn at least a part of their income from writing through service as a tutor or secretary in the house of a *grand* or a member of the royalty. (When women, such as Madame de Maintenon, did perform such service, it was not normally as a route to a career in writing.)[86] It was not unheard of for women writers to find patrons, but patronage (mécenat) paid less than service (clientélisme).[87] Madeleine de Scudéry had been protected by Fouquet before his disgrace and later received a pension from the king.

Madeleine de Scudéry, therefore, had first-hand knowledge of the dangers and difficulties of women's words. Her defense of speech reads like an attempt to protect a threatened feminine enclave. She stresses both the functional specificity of conversation as a civilizing

85. Emile Magne detects references to her group in the text. See De Pure 1:128n.

86. On the various avenues open to the would-be writer, see Viala, *Naissance*. Viala does not deal with the situation of the woman writer. In part, this lack of attention to women writers comes from their relative lack of numbers in Viala's findings. Of the 2,200 "writers" identified by Viala in the seventeenth century, only 60 are women. His figures do not at all match those of Joan DeJean, who lists 220 writers in her "Bibliography of Women Writers, 1640–1715." See DeJean, *Tender Geographies*, 201–19.

87. Viala, *Naissance*, 75. For *clientélisme* and *mécenat* as steps in the writer's career, see 51–84.

agent and the necessary presence of women to lead the way.[88] Ian Maclean claims that the debate on women's conversation came to an end by midcentury with a feminist victory.[89] And Elizabeth Goldsmith notes that by this time manuals of civility were advising people to acquire their social education through conversations with women.[90] In "De Parler trop ou trop peu et comment il faut parler" (On Speaking too much or too little and how to speak) (1680), the character Emile states categorically that conversation, not books, teaches the art of speaking: "it's not the place of books to teach speaking." A pedagogically fruitful conversation must take place in polite society (Gens du monde) "in which women are the majority." The unwelcome alternative to the speech of the salon is a bookish learning: "Otherwise there would be something too lofty, too learned, dry, harsh, or artificial in those who would model their speech on what they read. For since ordinarily Books don't speak as People in conversation do, you shouldn't speak like Books in conversation."[91]

For de Scudéry, gender is present in language. Emile's advice inflects this presence positively toward women. However, in a passage that immediately precedes Emile's advice, the presence negatively inflects feminine speech, as another character, Plotine, censors women's conversation. Her list of what propriety forbids women to say includes swearing, passing judgment on a difficult question, asserting one's opinion too firmly, and speaking about war. She censors not only the content of women's speech, but their manner: they need to guard against "speaking with a certain affected simplicity, which smacks of the child and is quite inappropriate. Neither should you speak foolishly. It is even less appropriate to listen to yourself speak, as do certain Women who indeed listen to the sound of every word they pronounce." Almost parenthetically, she makes the central observation of what has by now become impossible: "However, it's necessary to speak well." (36).

Plotine's censorship leaves little space for women to speak, much less to fill the ranks of a *mission civilisatrice* in language. The presence

88. Increasingly, Elizabeth Goldsmith points out, the salon became the preeminent conversational space, much more conducive than the court to sociability among honnêtes gens. Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations*, 6–7, 20, 24–25.

89. See Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, 151–52.

90. Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations*, 20.

91. Mademoiselle de Scudéry, "De Parler trop ou trop peu et comment il faut parler," in her *Choix de conversations*, ed. Phillip J. Wolfe (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 37. Further references to this *conversation* will be given in parentheses in the text.

of gender is such that it constrains women alone. They should neither imitate the speech of men nor fall prey to caricatures of femininity. On the other hand, class is a constraint operative on men and women alike.[92] Amilcar cautions his friends against speaking like the *peuple*. Better to have "a slight African accent" than to sound like the "vilest Artisans" (37). This advice "applies equally to Men and to Women" (36).

De Scudéry announces solidarity with her class, while detaching herself from her gender just enough to undermine her own solidarity with it. As a writer, she attempts to speak both as a man and as a woman. It is interesting that it is a man who highlights the prominence of women in conversation and a woman who censors their speech. De Scudéry writes her problematic status as a woman writer in words that betray her uncertain relationship to speech and writing.

By 1680, when de Scudéry published the first of her books of *conversations*, everyone knew her as a writer of highly successful novels. Yet she chose to continue not to sign her works. In her old age, after decades of fame as an author and salonnière, she still did not fully claim the authority of her words. However, in Joan DeJean's terms, hers was a "transparent" anonymity.[93] She played at revealing the secret. In her last collection, *Entretiens de morale* (1693), de Scudéry cites an exchange of verses between herself and a friend on the death of Charles de Montausier, announcing herself as someone "whom you all know."[94] Moreover, readers who knew the novels would recognize the *conversations* that were taken from them. If these volumes do not replicate exactly what was said in the Samedis, they reinvent the spoken conversations of her salon. There is no central protagonist, no consistent persona of the author. As a locus of thematic organization, she is decentered. Yet her signature is there, penned in invisible ink.

This invisible signature, at once a presence and an absence, forms the problematics of gender in her treatment of speech and writing. The dedication of the first collection, *Conversations sur divers sujets* (1680), announces the ambiguity inherent in her project to write the

92. Elizabeth Goldsmith, relying on the theories of Georg Simmel, analyzes de Scudéry's *Conversations* as emanating from the salon, an example of exclusive groups, which "counterbalance their collective sense of superiority with the conviction that they themselves are a community of equals." Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations*, 9–10. See also 48.

93. DeJean, "Lafayette's Ellipses," 886.

94. [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Entretiens de morale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Jean Anisson, 1693), 2:234–40.

spoken word. Unlike the usual dedicatory epistle or poem, de Scudéry's homage to the queen dauphine is cast in dialogue form. Theandre and Cleonte take a stroll through the Tuileries and see little groups of people all talking about "the extraordinary merit of the Dauphine." This circumstance occasions a layered self-reference to the *Conversations*, much in the same style as de Pure's reference to his own novel within *La Prétieuse*: "a lady of much wit said to me and to all the Company at her house that she had learned that a Collection of Conversations was being published . . . and that she was persuaded that this Book would not fail to be dedicated to Madame la Dauphine. . . . I am pleased to notify you that the Public awaits it." There follows a conversation on the difficulty of writing dedicatory epistles. It centers on a standard conceit of praise: one shouldn't try to praise people whose virtues are beyond all praise. Cleonte, who has assumed responsibility for the dedication, decides on a compromise: the book will be dedicated to the dauphine, but "in a special way, which is still a secret." Theandre advises him to follow another course: "As for me, if I were in your place, I would advise you to write down everything we've just said, so that Madame la Dauphine might know the reasons that have made us adopt this course, and so that even the public might not be unaware of them."

The literary transvestism in which Mademoiselle de Scudéry indulges herself here by hiding in Cleonte's clothes is in part denounced by Theandre, who urges the writer to leave secrecy and go public. But the dilemma of how to speak and write in a woman's voice is not resolved. For if going public, according to Theandre, meant to write down the spoken word, such publicity was denied to aristocratic women. De Scudéry did in fact write this dialogue. But because she never signed it, she cannot properly be said to be its author. The image at the opening of the dedicatory dialogue is a perfect metaphor for her situation. The French word for the little groups of people talking about the dauphine whom Theandre and Cleonte see in the Tuileries is *pelotons*. This was the term used for the crowds surrounding the *nouvellistes*, or gatherers and purveyors of news, who regularly stationed themselves in the Tuileries. In an age when the only acceptable sources of news were those officially sanctioned by the state, the services of these unofficial reporters were indispensable. Theirs was an underground network through which both written and spoken words were passed. They did write down the spoken word and did make it available to the public, but only on condition of anonymity. Secretly, they went public.

A "Conversation de la manière d'écrire des lettres" (Conversation on the Way to Write Letters) (1684) deepens de Scudéry's ambivalence about writing.[95] The problematic protagonist of this conversation is a woman named Aminte, who has what might be called graphophobia. Her relative Cleante sends her collections of letters by some of the most eloquent letter writers from among both the ancients and the moderns. Because Aminte is bashful about her writing, she declines to thank Cleante by letter. Instead she sends him a madrigal:

> No, I can't retract what I've said;
> The more I read, the more I admire,
> And the more I want to write nothing
> For one should never write,
> Unless one always writes well.[96]

Aminte's clever madrigal belies her words. The last two lines are a variant of the commonplace complaint about mediocre poets echoed by Boileau in his *Art poétique* (1674). Aminte's very pro-scription, which is also de Scudéry's, violates the common proscription.

In this *conversation*, the woman who refuses to write letters becomes a figure for the woman of letters. Aminte observes that in the volumes of letters given to her by Cleante there are very few by women. She concludes that not only have women written less than men, but that "they wrote poorly" (2:512). It is Clindor (a man) who comes to the defense of women by saying that there have undoubtedly always been women who write well but who have been prevented by feminine modesty from publishing their work (2:513). Finally, Berise and Cleante try to goad Aminte into writing by sending her a barrage of letters that require answers, such as marriage and death announcements. She responds by a "profound silence." Nevertheless, her conversation gives her friends much enjoyment when she

95. For an illuminating discussion of interrelations between speech and writing in letters, see Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations*, 28–37.

96. Non, je ne m'en sçaurois dédire;
Et plus je lis, et plus j'admire,
Et plus je veux n'écrire rien
Car on ne doit jamais écrire,
Que quand on écrit toûjours bien.

[Madeleine de Scudéry], *Conversations nouvelles sur divers sujets, Dédiées au Roy*, 2 vols. (Paris: Barbin, 1684), 2:503–6. References to this *conversation* will be given in parentheses in the text.

returns to town: "for on her return she said a thousand pleasant things to them in order to justify or to excuse [her silence], which made them realize that she had only to write what she thought in order to write perfectly well" (2:552).

As a woman of letters (that she receives but does not write), Aminte's greatest eloquence is her silence. Despite her friends' conviction that she has only a small step to take from her speech to perfect writing, we never get to read/hear the "thousand pleasant things" that she tells them. As a "conversation of absent people" (2:535), the letter would be a logical vehicle for her. But the only writing she produces is the madrigal. In it, Aminte does not refuse to write; she refuses not to write well. Someone (presumably Madeleine de Scudéry) must have made the judgment that Aminte's madrigal, a playful conceit about writing, was well written. Aminte is a woman of letters in spite of herself.

Aminte's self-imposed silence was validated in the larger culture by the silence in which the educated woman was generally expected to surround herself.[97] Louis de Lesclache, who often spoke at the vicomtesse d'Auchy's "academy" and gave conférences in "philosophy" from 1635 to 1669 which were addressed particularly to women, was despite these activities all in favor of silencing his feminine public. He is known for having made philosophy accessible to women by teaching in French and shedding the mantle of scholasticism. An anonymous female admirer called him a "Court Aristotle."[98] A written record of one of his courses gives us a good idea of the kind of philosophy that he taught. By 1667, the date of his *Avantages que les femmes peuvent recevoir de la philosophie* (Advantages that Women Can Gain from Philosophy), the popularity of Lesclache's courses was on the wane, possibly because Cartesian philosophy had become too great a competitor for him.[99] The first chapter of this document is devoted to a vituperative caricature of the learned woman, who neglects morality, religion, and womanly duties for the pursuit of a knowledge with distinctly Cartesian overtones. Lesclache concludes

97. Joan Gibson has shown how in women's education of the Renaissance the reduction of the trivium to grammar alone was in fact an instruction in silence. See Joan Gibson, "Educating for Silence: Renaissance Women and the Language Arts," *Hypatia* 4 (Spring 1989): 9–27. I am grateful to Amélie O. Rorty for pointing me to this issue of *Hypatia*.

98. On Lesclache, see Charles Urbain, "Louis de Lesclache (1600?–1671)," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 1 (1894): 353–58.

99. Ibid., 356.

that his brand of philosophy is necessary for teaching women to be silent: "If women . . . were to add Philosophy to their inclination to express their thoughts and to the ease with which they do so, they would be unbearable in company. But . . . they should learn Philosophy in order to moderate their desire to speak and in order to understand clearly that silence as well as speech is useful to society."[100]

Like Aminte, de Scudéry cannot take responsibility for her words in becoming visible as a writer. Was it her consistent refusal to authorize her works with her signature that earned her widespread praise for modesty? Her personal correspondence bears out her reputation. She teasingly denies full praise to "Acante" (Paul Pellisson) for his *Histoire de l'Académie française*, claiming that she possesses only a "mediocre intelligence" for "what is beyond the knowledge of ladies." She wouldn't dare to write all her thoughts, she says. "I don't even know if I haven't said too much for a lady who doesn't want to pass herself off as learned."[101] In de Scudéry's *conversation* "De la Modestie," where the norm of feminine modesty is discussed, one character recommends that writers in general efface themselves from their works.[102] De Scudéry's *conversations* are literally "conversations of absent persons." They imply that "real" conversations have a presence that is absent in the written genre, a genre which plays second fiddle to the spoken word.

De Scudéry's discomfort with women's words extends even to the feminine domain of the salon. In "De la Conversation" (1680), Athis tells a story to illustrate men's superiority in conversation. On a visit to her friend Lysidice, she finds herself in an all-female gathering centered around her friend's mother. She and a friend are bored to tears by the women's conversation until a man arrives. He is no one at all special, but as soon as he enters the room the entire conversation picks up. Athis and Lysidice later agree that women's talk of clothes and home furnishings can be deadly. Athis nevertheless takes up the defense of women by observing that there are just as many disagreeable conversationalists among men as among women. Her complaint is not about individual women or about one-on-one conversations

100. Louis de Lesclache, *Les Avantages que les femmes peuvent recevoir de la philosophie, et principalement de la morale* (Paris: Chez l'Autheur et Laurent Rondet, 1667), 3–24, esp. 22.

101. L[ucien] Belmont, "Documents inédits sur la société et la littérature précieuses: Extraits de la Chronique du Samedi publiés d'après le registre original de Pellisson (1652–1657)," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 9 (1902): 661–62.

102. [De Scudéry], *Entretiens de morale*, 1:11.

among them, but about female homosocial gatherings. To these gatherings she counterposes the conversation of all-male groups, which may be less "playful" (enjoüée) than that of a mixed group: "But ordinarily, although [their conversation] is more serious, it is nonetheless reasonable, and they do without us more easily than we do without them."[103]

The two friends compliment each other that present company is excluded from their dislike of all-female conversations. But Lysidice adds that if Athis were multiplied by twelve, she would no longer enjoy her conversation. A man makes all the difference: "there is a certain something . . . which makes a Man provide more entertainment to a gathering of women than the most amiable woman on earth could do." Even two women alone, not friends, would not enjoy talking as much as they would if each one were talking to "a Man of wit whom they had never seen," says Lysidice, adding, "You can judge from that if I'm not right to complain about my sex in general" (1:20–23).

Athis's story ends on this note. It is worthy of mention that her conversation with Lysidice is embedded in a conversation that takes place in a mixed group, as the *conversations* invariably do. In framing the conversation between Athis and Lysidice in the larger mixed conversation, de Scudéry puts into literary practice Lysidice's observation of women's linguistic dependency on men. It is only in passing that Lysidice comments on how painful that dependency can be for women: "However, this gives me so much chagrin that I can't even describe it to you" (1:20). Her image of men's groups as autonomous, self-sufficient, serious, and consistently reasonable evokes the atmosphere of the informal male academy. In this picture, the one thing that the frivolous women can offer the rational men is *enjouement*, a certain playfulness that characterizes the salon. The trade-off between enjouement and seriousness is easily decided in favor of the men.

The imbalance between enjouement and seriousness recalls the asymmetrical distribution of the sexes in the salon and the academy. This asymmetry is apparent in de Scudéry's portrait of the *chambre bleue* in *Le Grand Cyrus* (1649–53). Cléomire (Madame de Rambouillet) is praised for the modesty of her demeanor in not letting her exten-

103. [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 2 vols. (Paris: Loüis Billaine, 1680), 1:20. Further references to this *conversation* will be found in parentheses in the text.

sive knowledge obtrude into the salon.[104] Aristhée (Chapelain) is superficially Cléomire's male counterpart.[105] He, too, is praised for knowing *le Monde* as well as *les Sciences*. He is *sçavan* without affectation. He has mastered the conversational code of the salon: "Aristhée has neither the strict virtue nor the bold learning that would make him scorn the conversation of women. On the contrary, he takes an extreme pleasure in it and spends entire afternoons so happily talking about trifles that you would think he wasn't capable of talking about anything else" (7:545–46). Cléomire–Madame de Rambouillet needs to hide her learning behind her worldliness if she is to continue to attract men and women of good society to her salon, her only venue for intellectual exchange. Aristhée-Chapelain, on the other hand, has the choice of dropping in on the chambre bleue from Conrart's group (the nucleus of the Académie Française) for a little recreation. He is praised not for cloaking his learning in the social graces, as is Madame de Rambouillet, but for not disdaining women's talk.

Elsewhere in the novel, de Scudéry's idealized self-portrait, Sapho, cautions that the learned lady should always hide her knowledge.[106] Sapho herself doesn't let people suspect how learned she is: "Although it's almost unknown that Sapho has learned anything at all, she knows everything."[107] She is learned "without showing off her learning" (sans faire la sçavante) (10:301). Damophile, the lady pedant

104. [Madeleine] de Scudéry, *Artamène, ou Le Grand Cyrus*, 10 vols. (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1649–53), 7:493.

105. René Godenne has recently questioned the value of the "key" to *Le Grand Cyrus* that Victor Cousin claimed to have discovered in 1858, a key on which so much of subsequent de Scudéry criticism has been based. See René Godenne, *Les Romans de Mademoiselle de Scudéry* (Geneva: Droz, 1983), 83–96. Although I agree with him that modern readings of the novel can stand on their own merit without reference to a key, any historical appreciation of de Scudéry's work must take into account the topical value of the novel for her contemporaries. Many of the identifications in Cousin's "key" are confirmed by the writings of contemporaries.

106. [Madeleine] de Scudéry, *Artamène, ou Le Grand Cyrus*, 10 vols. (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1654), 10:359. Madeleine Alcover has noted that this caution was a literary commonplace. See her essay "The Indecency of Knowledge," *Rice University Studies* 64 (Winter 1978): 28. In this article on the problem of the femme savante in de Scudéry's writings, Alcover views the writer's endorsement of the social code of modesty as essentially conservative. Joan DeJean points out that Sapho is not only de Scudéry's fictionalized self-portrait, but is also a very erudite biography of the poet Sappho; that is, she is de Scudéry's rewriting of herself through the poet from Greek antiquity. See Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 104, 112.

107. De Scudéry, *Le Grand Cyrus* (1654), 10:300. Unless otherwise specified, further references to *Le Grand Cyrus* will be to this edition.

who speaks "in a Bookish style," is her counterportrait, her bad sister. Joan DeJean sees her not as de Scudéry's "specular image," but rather as her "recreation of the male intellectual's projection of his female counterpart."[108] There is no denying the presence of this optic, but it is tinted with de Scudéry's own ambivalence. Damophile may be a projection of men's fear of the femme savante, but the modest Sapho can be read as a projection of men's desire, as their ideal of the unthreatening, intelligent woman. For women as well as for men, Damophile's conversation is a violation of propriety because it violates norms of gendered space. She belongs more to an academy than to polite society: "she . . . finds it no more difficult to cite the most obscure Authors in ordinary conversation than if she were teaching publicly in some famous Academy" (10:316). Damophile's very name is confusingly androgynous.[109] Is she a lover of *dames* or of *damoiseaux*? In her attempt to imitate Sapho, she is a lover of women. But her imitation falls flat because of her love for the masculine world of learning. Instead of basking in Sapho's glory, she gives her a bad name among people who confuse the two women. The relationship between the two characters suggests that the emulation is mutual. Damophile seems like Sapho's repressed other, the learned lady that Sapho would like openly to be.

The split between Sapho and Damophile uneasily delimits space for women's discourse. It assigns the "good sister" to the society of the salon, the "bad sister" to the academy, as it consigns Sapho to talk and Damophile to books. Yet their two domains overlap. Sapho is also a writer, and Damophile wants to talk. Sapho seemingly gives priority to talk over reading: "I would like [women] to read only in order to learn how to speak well." In her fear of contravening feminine propriety, however, she virtually condemns women to silence: "What I wish to teach Women in the main . . . is not to speak too much about what they don't know well and never to speak about what they don't know at all" (10:363). Her own conversation is strictly self-censored: "she is so careful to remain within the bounds of propriety for her sex that she hardly speaks save of what Ladies should talk about, and you have to be among her very close friends for her even to admit that she's learned something" (10:302). Sapho is praised for her writing, but she is so modest that she doesn't want her poetry to

108. DeJean, *Fictions*, 108.

109. The French orthography "Damophile" seems to invite an accretion of meanings to Philostratus's legendary "Damophyla." On de Scudéry's use of this ancient source, see DeJean, *Fictions*, 108.

be read (10:300, 320). When she goes to the concert where she meets Damophile, she finds that everyone is talking about her; she has become a "monster," a museum piece or marvel on display (10: 322–23).

If Sapho is so modest, how does she gain such a reputation for learning? If she reveals her knowledge only in secret, to a few close friends, how does she come to be applauded by a wide public? De Scudéry never answers these questions satisfactorily. Sapho manages both to hide her erudition and to end up on display. The golden mean that she advises for women—"neither very learned nor very ignorant" (10:363)—cannot resolve the ambivalence about the intellectual woman that is embodied in the Sapho/Damophile split. The split does not succeed in neatly dividing the two "sisters" between feminine conversation and masculine writing. Permissible discursive space for de Scudéry and her women characters was not so easily delimited. Leakage from the space of writing (the academy) to the space of speaking (the salon) is evident in Damophile's desire to imitate Sapho and in Sapho's repression of the Damophile within her.

Sapho's concealment of learning and writing in her conversation is revealed by de Scudéry's writing. The rules of polite conversation did not allow Sapho the liberty that Damophile heedlessly took: "[Sapho's] conversation is so natural, so easy, and so elegant [galante] that all you ever hear her say in a general conversation are things that you would think a Person of great wit might say without having learned everything that she knows" (10:301). But writing is a betrayal. Learning that is contained in "natural" conversation spills out in writing, especially in writing by those, like Madeleine de Scudéry, who follow Aminte's injunction to write well.

Freedom and Subversion

Both the salon and the academy claimed that their discourse was free. In both cases, it was a putative freedom *from* certain formal constraints that allowed for a freedom *to* subvert received ideas. There the symmetry ends. The salon's freedom proved largely illusory, its subversion unfruitful. The dissent sown in the academy, on the other hand, had far-reaching implications for the development of a discourse that was to outlive the Old Regime by at least two centuries.

A recurrent motif of de Scudéry's *conversations* is a contrast between the freedom of the informal conversations among small groups of

friends and the ceremony of obligatory visits from larger groups that not infrequently interrupt them.[110] Beneath a veneer of hermeneutic liberty, it is not at all obvious what is free in the conversation of the salon. "De la Conversation" delivers a mixed message about polite talk. On the one hand, it should revolve around "ordinary and gracious things" (choses ordinaires & galantes) rather than around "great things." On the other hand, all subjects should be admitted: "even Learning [les Sciences] can readily enter into it."[111] This catholicity is more formal than substantive, for propriety in effect imposes constraints. What is required is a studied spontaneity that limits each participant to his or her social role: "Women will not inappropriately show themselves learned nor excessively show themselves ignorant, and everyone will say only what he is obliged to say in order to make the conversation pleasant" (41).[112] For polite society, freedom is a semblance of universality, a gesture toward embracing all things while submitting to the restrictions of decorum:

> You can be assured that there's nothing you can't say in conversation provided that you have wit and judgment, and that you take carefully into account where you are, to whom you're speaking and who you yourself are. However, although judgment is absolutely necessary to avoid saying anything inappropriate, the conversation must nevertheless appear so free that it seems that no thought is rejected and that people say whatever comes into their heads, without having any formal plan to talk about one thing rather than another. For nothing is so ridiculous as those People who can say wonders on certain subjects and on all else offer nothing but foolishness. (40–41)

The substantive freedom that de Scudéry grants to conversation is belied by even the titles of two of the *conversations* that she included in her first collection of 1680: "Contre ceux qui parlent peu serieusement

110. See, for example, [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Nouvelles Conversations de morale* (The Hague: Jacob van Ellinkhuysen, 1692), 24, 212–13, 493–94, and Mademoiselle de Scudéry, *Choix de conversations*, 153–54. In "De l'Impatience," Agariste's complaint that a large number of relatives "whom one does not choose" might come and interrupt the conversation supports Chartier's idea that seventeenth-century privacy was a zone of freedom from both the family and the state. See [de Scudéry], *Entretiens de morale*, 1:68, 223.

111. [De Scudéry], *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1:38–39.

112. This passage may echo the restrictions placed on women's conversation by moralists such as Jacques du Bosc and François de Grenaille. See Maclean, *Woman Triumphant*, 146.

de la religion" (Against Those Who Speak Disrespectfully of Religion) and "Contre ceux qui décrient le Gouvernement, quel qu'il soit" (Against Those Who Decry the Government, Whatever It May Be). We learn in the first of these conversations that gender imposes an additional censorship on women's speech. *Libertinage*, or freethinking, for example, is reprehensible in a man, but unthinkable in a woman. Agathirse defends himself to Noromate against the charge of libertinage and asks her why she hasn't said anything about *libertines*. She says in reply that a freethinking woman is "the height of madness." Women's "modest ignorance" should quell any of their doubts and keep them safely within their received religion: "Indeed it's certain that nothing is so apt to embolden a Man in love with a fair one than seeing how she takes pleasure in listening to people who mock Religion, and nothing is so unbecoming to a Woman than the trait of being unconvinced by what she should believe."[113] Similarly, as "Contre ceux qui décrient le Gouvernement" makes clear, talking about politics is a much more grievous social error for women than it is for men. Social class is once again the first dividing line of acceptability, for "people of quality" do not complain about their government: "Whether it be of a Kingdom or a Republic, people have to complain. . . . This sort of complaint should be made by the People rather than by People of quality." For aristocratic women, talk of politics, which shocks the norms of both class and gender, is then a double violation of propriety: "You see Women who aren't even clever enough to comb their hair expressing their feelings about the most difficult affairs of State as boldly as if they had the wisdom and experience of Solon. However, it would be much less strange to see the seven Sages of Greece choosing Ribbons than to see so many young People of both sexes dabbling in the rule of State" (1:255–57).

Significantly, the topics that escape the rules of censorship laid down in the *conversations* are love and marriage, the very ones that preoccupied de Pure's précieuses. These were the topics that raised contemporaries' doubts about the moral value of de Scudéry's novels. Sapho, the otherwise morally impeccable heroine of *Le Grand Cyrus*, views marriage as a "long slavery" and husbands as tyrants (*Cyrus*, 10:309–10). The female characters in de Scudéry's novels routinely reject love in favor of friendship, especially female friendship. These predilections and opinions are repeated throughout the *conversations*,

113. [De Scudéry], *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1:196–97. Further references to these two *conversations* will be found in parentheses in the text.

but in a context that clearly marks Madeleine de Scudéry as a *moraliste*. In the long "Histoire de la morale" (History of Moral Sentiments) that forms a centerpiece to the collection of 1688, Méliton defines "la morale" as "the important art [science] that teaches how to set limits on all passions."[114] The theme of subduing the passions recurs often in the *conversations* as a support to the rejection of marriage and conventional heterosexual relationships.[115] De Scudéry's attempt to "moralize" the rejection of marriage somewhat cushions the shock of her ideas about men and women, but her female characters, like de Pure's, speak the language of subversion.

We can appreciate the fuller implications of this subversion by a consideration of the *conversation*, "Des Passions que les hommes ont inventées" (Passions That Men Have Invented) (1680). In this *conversation*, one character's ruling passion, his love of the king, leads to an apology for monarchy in general and praise for the French monarchy in particular. The monarchy has something divine about it which inspires religious respect in its subjects. The king is a like a father and benefactor. The relationship of the subject and prince is compared to marriage, because in each case both parties supposedly share the same interests. Celanire remarks that women in effect have nothing at stake in the fortunes of the monarchy: "Countless times I've seen persons of my sex get so interested in the outcome [of a prince's actions] that, forgetting that they have no part in the State, they will say, talking about some illustrious deed: we beat the enemy and took their cannons and their equipment." Philocrite replies by commenting on a similar reaction among the *peuple*: "many times I've been astonished at the rapture of the People when they've been obliged to light bonfires in celebration of some victory. For there are millions of men who rejoice on these occasions and who don't have enough to live on for tomorrow."[116] This passage is one of the rare instances in which de Scudéry allows gender to drive a wedge between members of the elites.

On the surface an elaborate compliment to the king, who after all pensioned the writer in 1683, "Des Passions que les hommes ont

114. [De Scudéry], *Nouvelles Conversations*, 41.

115. See, for example, [de Scudéry], *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 2:517; and [Madeleine de Scudéry], *La Morale du monde, ou conversations*, 2 vols. in 1 (Amsterdam: Pierre Mortier, 1686), 2:67. For an excellent discussion of the androgyny and ambiguous sexuality of Sapho, the heroine of de Scudéry's *Le Grand Cyrus*, see Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, 105–6.

116. [De Scudéry], *Conversations sur divers sujets*, 1:271–94.

inventées" raises serious questions about the value of the relationship between the monarch and his subjects. In particular, it questions the relation of women to the state. If the model for the monarchy is patriarchal marriage (as, reciprocally, the model for the family at the time was the state), women are doomed to marginality and unhappiness. The exchange between Celanire and Philocrite may be placed alongside a comment by Cesonie in "De l'Oisiveté & de l'ingratitude" (On Idleness and Ingratitude) (1680). Ingratitude is understandable, she says, in relationships formed without personal choice, such as those of marriage, those between king and subject, father and children.[117] Taken together, the comments cited from the two *conversations* suggest an alliance of women and the poor in the solidarity of outsiders. It is hard not to read "Des Passions que les hommes ont inventées" as if "hommes" (men) were underlined.

There is both a feminine and a masculine language of subversion in the *conversations*. The feminine language, submerged beneath censorship, speaks from the outside about love and marriage. Through euphemization, rejection of conventional marriage comes to have a spiritual and moral value. The masculine language of subversion receives even less attention than the feminine. In "Contre ceux qui parlent peu serieusement de la religion" (1680), the suspected *libertin* Agathirse asks Chrisante what makes him think that "the Divinity you're talking about is interested in things of this world, and that after death there are rewards or punishments?"[118] There is a Voltairean ring to this subversion. It is spoken from the inside, that is, from within the space of those who had the possibility of effecting political, religious, and social change. Agathirse plays with fire, but he speaks with the confidence of someone who recognizes the potential power of his dissent.

Intellectual freedom was a companion to this dissent. It was a freedom organized by the library, where the exchange of books, manuscripts, maps, information, and so forth legitimated the exchange of ideas.[119] The library, where in general rules of censorship were suspended, was a privileged place for research and discussion. There scholars of different religions, beliefs, interests, and social back-

117. Ibid., 2:433.
118. Ibid., 1:187.
119. See Pintard, *Libertinage*, 87. Dena Goodman points out that in the eighteenth century André Morellet contrasted the freedom of all-male gatherings with what he perceived to be the constraint of the salon. See Goodman, "Governing the Republic of Letters," 190.

grounds agreed to disagree and to air their questions as openly as possible. The conditions of freedom for this embryonic republic of letters were discipline and order in the proceedings, mutual trust, strict criteria for selection of members, and a hermetic closure to the outside world.

Louis Habert de Montmor sponsored an academy that met in his large library from 1654 to 1664. Montmor, a disaffected member of the Académie Française, frequented both the Cabinet Du Puy and the Hôtel de Rambouillet. A Cartesian who befriended Descartes to the point of offering him lodging in his country house, he also invited Pierre Gassendi, Descartes's philosophical rival, to stay with him in Paris. The wide embrace of his hospitality is indicative of the range of opinion in his academy, which numbered among its members Jean Chapelain, Michel de Marolles, Gilles Ménage, Gui Patin, Pierre Petit, Gilles Personne de Roberval, Ismaël Boulliau, François Bernier, Samuel Sorbière, and Abraham du Prat. As the names indicate, the group was interested in both belles-lettres and natural philosophy, but it is more noted for its scientific interests and its possible connection with the founding of the Académie des Sciences. In 1658, Sorbière and du Prat drew up a constitution for the Montmorians, which specified procedures for the meetings and qualifications for membership. Article I declared that the aim of the group was "the clearer knowledge of the works of God and the improvement of the conveniences of life in the Arts and Sciences that seek to establish them." This twin goal harbors a possible inner contradiction, for, as is well known, anti-Aristotelianism, hence heterodoxy, accompanied the development of the natural sciences in the seventeenth century.[120]

The very figure of academic freedom in the seventeenth century was of course the libertin érudit. The term "freethinker" signifies a dangerous liberty that has somewhat unjustifiably become identified solely with unorthodox religious beliefs. But, as René Pintard has amply demonstrated, unfettered research was uppermost in the minds of the men who frequented the Cabinet Du Puy and other academic circles. Such research inevitably placed itself on a collision course with orthodoxy in religion and politics. Cosmopolitan in their membership and their concerns, the academies served also as natural havens for colleagues bruised by the collision. The Du Puy circle offered hospitality to Tommaso Campanella when he fled from the

120. On the Montmor Academy, see Brown, *Scientific Organizations*, 64–134 and de Boer, "Men's Literary Circles," 772–75.

Italian Inquisition, and it also expressed support for Galileo. Its generosity was not based on a congruence of theoretical interests, but rather on the recognition of fellow-intellectuals as an endangered species.[121]

The men's circles had greater cause for paranoia about "spies" than did the salons. In many of the men's groups, the formal freedom to speak on any subject allowed by de Scudéry in her *conversations* violated the taboos of polite society. Religion and politics were not necessarily out of bounds. In his account of the meetings of the Cabinet Du Puy, François de La Mothe le Vayer disingenuously expresses surprise that politics was a subject of conversation there. He relates a story of treachery in which one member was denounced by another to Richelieu.[122] Most groups took the elementary precaution of "euphemization," that is, a carefully worded presentation of their ideas, but they still worried about infiltration by spies. In one of his letters, the physician Gui Patin, a member of Gabriel Naudé's circle, which met from 1644 to 1652, looks forward with delight to a meeting at Naudé's country home at Gentilly, where, he says, they will have a "philosophic debauch." He refers to a previous visit to Gentilly, when he was alone with Naudé. The two were able to have a tête-à-tête without worrying about betrayal: "there were no witnesses; therefore none were needed. We spoke freely about everything without anyone being scandalized."[123]

Because the membership of the conférences was larger and more diffuse than that of the private academy, those in charge often exercised greater self-censorship. Yet even here many liberties were taken. Théophraste Renaudot specifically banishes talk of politics and religion, possibly because women may have been present or because as a pioneer in the field who was under Richelieu's protection, he needed to minimize his risks.[124] At the same time, he emphasized that people were to be free to seek the truth without having to bow to the authority of either the ancients or the schools.[125] The abbé Bourdelot's scientific academy for men went public five years after its inception in 1665 and continued until Bourdelot's death in 1685, sometimes attracting an audience of as many as four hundred.[126] Le

121. See Pintard, *Libertinage*, 96–100.
122. La Mothe le Vayer, *Mémorial*, 291; 67–71.
123. Quoted from a letter by Gui Patin in de Boer, "Men's Literary Circles," 759.
124. Solomon, *Public Welfare*, 92.
125. See Renaudot, *Recueil*, 1:4, and "Avis au lecteur."
126. On Bourdelot's academy, see Brown, *Scientific Organizations*, 231–53.

Gallois, who recorded some of the proceedings, stressed the freedom that prevailed there. Foreigners as well as Frenchmen were received, and everyone could "speak with freedom." All philosophical parties were welcome—Cartesian, Gassendist, Paracelsan, Lullist. Reason rather than authority was to be the guide in the search for truth: "Everyone is free to believe what he wishes; no one is constrained; and without any other attachment than to truth . . . you uphold your position as best as you can."[127]

In his conférences, the surgeon Jean-Baptiste Denis proved himself a master of the art of euphemization. Rather than contest the Aristotelian theory of the soul, specifically the vegetative soul of plants, Denis said he would keep the traditional terms but would investigate the matters to which they referred by the natural light of reason.[128] Denis, who was a physician to the king, needed to cover his tracks.

The state's relative level of interest in the activities of the salon and the academy respectively is demonstrated by the fact that it appropriated the informal academy and not the salon. The prestige and power that accrued to the official academies was, to be sure, offset by the necessity to submit to state control. It was against this control that Montmor and other dissidents in the Académie Française chafed. In the case of the Académie des Sciences, however, the men involved perceived that the advantages of institutionalization outweighed the disadvantages. It didn't take the Montmorians long to see that the time was ripe for an alliance of science and the state. In the early 1660s, word came from across the Channel of Charles II's interest in the Royal Society. It was in part an awareness of the centrality of experimentation in the successful English body that prompted a keener interest in experimental activity in Montmor's academy.

The 1660s were a watershed in the history of the relations between the salon and the academy. The founding of the Académie des Sciences in 1666 was the culmination of several trends that spelled the eclipse of the salon by the growing favor of academies. The "free" intellectual inquiry of the academy attracted Louis XIV's interest not only because he needed to check its subversive tendencies, but also because it was in the atmosphere of such inquiry that there arose the scientific observation and experimentation that were to prove so crucial to the development of mercantilism and early industry in France.

127. *Conversations de l'Académie de Bourdelot*, 61–62.

128. Jean-Baptiste Denis, *Recoeuil* [*sic*] *des memoires et conferences sur les arts et les sciences, presentées a Monseigneur le Dauphin* (Amsterdam: Pierre Michel, 1673), 204–6.

Among the Montmorians, a split that developed between experimentalists and those who wanted more discussion had serious implications for the fortunes of the salon. by 1661, it was clear that history was on the side of the experimentalists. It remained only to find the financial support for the necessary equipment, a support that would soon be forthcoming from the king. The link between the Montmorians and the world of the salons was conversation and discussion. When the academic talkers lost out, this link was considerably weakened, especially in the case of the more scientifically-minded academies.[129]

The connection had in any event been more apparent than real. The male academy made discursive space for a type of dissent that paradoxically eventuated in official protection. In making the search for truth take precedence over religious and political orthodoxy, the academicians allowed room for an intellectual development that had unforeseen results. Carlo Ginzburg has shown how in the seventeenth century adherence to the traditional interpretation of Pauline doctrine against intellectual curiosity gave way to an endorsement of a bold search for knowledge.[130] Women, however, remained unaffected by this change. In the salon, the norms of gender prevented women from creating a similar space. The demands of feminine modesty and the inaccessibility of the educational apparatus necessary for the formation of academicians—formal schooling, voyages, materials, and equipment—kept even the most educated women well within the limits of orthodoxy. Indeed, whatever intellectual development they underwent was contingent on remaining within these limits. Madeleine de Scudéry would have lost her salon and her reputation as a writer had she exceeded them.[131] The dissent harbored by the salon, a questioning of gender roles in marriage and the family, was positively inimical to the interests of the state.

129. On the history of experimentalism in Montmor's academy, see Brown, 101–42. I have discussed the growing importance of science and scientific circles to economic development under Louis XIV in my *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 224–78.

130. Carlo Ginzburg, "High and Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Past and Present* 73 (November 1976): 28–41.

131. A celebrated exception to the ban on libertinage among salonnières was Ninon de Lenclos. Talk of religion was not out of bounds in her salon. However, it wasn't until she had metamorphosed herself from the courtesan "Ninon" into "Mademoiselle de Lenclos" that she managed to acquire the reputation for "decency" that would allow respectable people to visit her. See Roger Picard, *Les Salons littéraires et la société française, 1610–1789* (New York: Brentano's, 1943), 126–32.

The male academies founded a tradition of dissent which had no true counterpart in the salon. In a peculiar historical conjunction of events, the scientific expertise that grew up in the academies was inseparable from a questioning of the very powers that needed the new knowledge to further the interests of state. Although the line of descent from the libertins érudits and other academicians to the eighteenth-century philosophes is not unbroken, it is significant that by the seventeenth century the word *philosophe* had come to have the connotation of the disabused, impartial seeker after knowledge that we usually associate with the so-called Enlightenment.[132] Daniel Roche, who has discussed the links between the philosophes of the *Encyclopédie* and the academies, sees the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century academy as an instance of an "alliance of power and knowledge."[133]

Feminine dissent thus had a limited public. It was not calculated to appeal to mixed company and was at best an object of curiosity to men like Michel de Pure. Despite all the attention lavished on the salon from its heyday in the seventeenth century to the present, it afforded but a relatively circumscribed discursive space to women.[134] As Christoph Strosetzki has shown, the freedom of talk in the salon was regulated by an elaborate rhetoric of conversation;[135] this conversation was also ruled by strict norms of gendered behavior. The salonnières' claim that they were free of the academies' constraints is suspect. Our documentation suggests to the contrary that feminine dissent was subject to much more (self-)censorship that the masculine variety. The formal procedures and agendas that the salonnières shunned were the academicians' aids to euphemization, which helped to promote a liberty of dissent within established bounds. Excluded from the more powerful dissent of the academy and harboring possibly more subversive ideas of their own, women had little opportunity of contributing to the large historical movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by which a discourse of dissent rose to dominance.

132. See Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne, 1680–1715* (Paris: Fayard, 1961), 309–11. Harcourt Brown notes that there was a break in scientific activity from 1690 to 1710, but he nevertheless sees in the movement of the philosophes a "prolongation of a current already active." See Brown, *Scientific Organizations*, 262–63.

133. See Roche, *Siècle des lumières*, 1:30, 291–93.

134. Londa Schiebinger makes what I see as an inflated claim for the salon in calling it an "institution of science." Schiebinger, *Mind*, 30.

135. Strosetzki, *Rhétorique de la conversation*. See also Goldsmith, *Exclusive Conversations*, for a discussion of the primacy of form in sociable conversation.

2

The Cartésiennes

No phenomenon attests so eloquently to the salon's opportunities and limitations as do the women who were known as cartésiennes, or followers of Descartes. Contemporary accounts give the impression that from the 1640s to the 1660s the salons were beset by a craze for Cartesian philosophy. For salonnières, this Cartesian moment allowed for an exceptional discursive openness. At a time when the philosophy that granted reason and judgment (bon sens) to all humans was still controversial, its very simplicity and accessibility allowed women to enter the debate. The presentation of a lay learning in clear, understandable French was especially appealing to women. In fact, Descartes acknowledged that he purposely omitted from his *Discourse on Method* some complexities in his proof of God, because he didn't think that they would be appropriate for a book "of which I wanted even women to understand something."[1] Moreover, women could read Descartes's individualist quest to replace "prejudice" by "truth" as license to combat misogyny.[2] After the founding in 1666 of the Académie Royale des Sciences, which institutionalized women's exclusion from the new rationality, the moment of open discursive construction passed. Later examples of women's writing on Descartes reflect the view from the other side of the divide.

1. Letter to Father Vatier, in René Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, 12 vols. (Paris: Léopold Cerf, 1897–1910), 1:560. Hereafter referred to as AT.

2. See Michel Delon's perceptive discussion of the points of convergence between varieties of Cartesian thought and forms of feminism in his "Cartésianisme(s) et féminisme(s)," *Europe* 56 (October 1978): 73–86.

Much has been written about the hostile reaction to Descartes in the universities and schools. Very little is known about the critique that emanated from the salons, a critique that is embedded in the writings I will discuss. This critical questioning, both of the primacy of disembodied reason and of the value of objectivity, adumbrates what I will call a feminist alternative to the developing rational discourse. The writings of the cartésiennes suggest that at the inception of modern rational discourse there were women who offered tentative revisions of the Cartesian model. They did not present a self-conscious feminist program. I call their perspective "feminist" because their scattered and often obscurely framed comments, when carefully examined, become relevant to recent attempts to construct a feminist epistemology and science. With hindsight, we begin to understand that the late twentieth-century feminist critique of Cartesian rationalism and objectivity has a history.

Descartes's ideas were supposedly discussed in the salons of Madame de la Sablière, Madame Deshoulières, Mesdames de Bonnevaux, d'Outresale, d'Hommecour, and de Guedreville, among others.[3] Yet when it comes to tracking down these women, they are conspicuous by their absence. Most left few or no writings, and of what remains of their work, little concerns Descartes. Even Madame de Bonnevaux, who supposedly held lectures on Descartes in her home and figures in the correspondence of Christiaan Huygens, has left little trace of her activities.[4] It could be argued that the supreme art form of the salon was conversation. We have seen, however, that learned male habitués contributed no dearth of writing in a variety of genres. More is known about Descartes's two royal patrons, Queen Christina of Sweden and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, but even they left no counterpart to the scholarly work of male Cartesians.

3. Most of these women are mentioned in contemporary lists of learned women. See Marguerite Buffet, *Traité sur les éloges des illustres sçavantes, anciennes et modernes*, bound with her *Nouvelles Observations sur la langue françoise* (Paris: Jean Cusson, 1668), and [Jean de] La Forge, *Le Cercle des femmes sçavantes* (Paris: Jean Baptiste Loyson, 1663). For women as catalysts in the diffusion of Cartesian philosophy, see Antoine Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle*, 5 vols. (Paris: Del Duca, 1962), 3:18–19; Francisque Bouillier, *Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne*, 2 vols. (Paris: Durand; Lyon: Brun, 1854) 1:420–26; and Gustave Reynier, *La Femme au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Tallandier, 1929), 174–77. Madame de la Sablière is particularly well known as the addressee of Jean de La Fontaine's "Discours à Madame de La Sablière" (in Book IX of the *Fables*), in which the poet debates Descartes's theory of animals as automata.

4. On Madame de Bonnevaux, see Buffet, *Traité*, 264–66.

Perhaps we can explain this absence by the inevitable effacement of women behind what Susan Bordo has called the "Cartesian masculinization of thought."[5] But on closer inspection, women who have been thought of as Cartesians since the seventeenth century turn out to have minds of their own. Elisabeth's letters to Descartes reveal a profound questioning of her correspondent's thought. Three women in Madeleine de Scudéry's circle seem to represent a kind of Cartesian underground. Although they receive nothing more than a footnote in a recent study of women in seventeenth-century France,[6] their writings display a critical attitude toward those features of Descartes's philosophy that were to have the greatest impact on the development of modern rational discourse: his dualism, mechanism, and objectivity.

Unlike male critics of Descartes, such as Simon Foucher (1644–1696), these women offer no systematic philosophical commentary.[7] Their classification as cartésiennes is all the more intriguing. What did it mean to be a cartésienne? Did it suffice merely to evince a curiosity about the new philosophy? The cartésiennes are of interest for discursive rather than for philosophical history. With the notable exception of Elisabeth, they do not address specific philosophical points as much as they do broad trends of the new rationality. Their resistance to certain implications of Cartesianism from within a largely welcoming frame marks them more as Cartesian women than as women Cartesians.

By the eighteenth century, the picture was very different. The atmosphere of struggle, debate, and creative construction disappeared. Women's writing on Descartes from this time reflects either a largely

5. See Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 97–118.

6. Wendy Gibson, *Women in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989). Antoine Adam makes only the briefest mention of them. See Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 3:19. Women *malebranchistes* have gotten even less attention. I in turn can do no more in this study than note them here. Among the women said to have been interested in the Cartesian Nicolas de Malebranche's philosophy were Mesdames d'Epernon, de Rohan, and d'Aubeterre, Mademoiselle de Verthamont, Madame la marquise de l'Hôpital, and, predictably, Elisabeth of Bohemia. Mademoiselle de Vailly, the goddaughter of Malebranche's brother (Nicolas the younger), held a malebranchiste salon that featured lectures on his works. See [Nicolas de] Malebranche, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Gouhier, 20 vols. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1962–70), 20:28, 199–201. Cf. Gibson, *Women*, 38–39; 273, n. 148.

7. For a concise discussion of Foucher's contribution to critical literature on Cartesian philosophy, see Richard A. Watson, *The Downfall of Cartesianism, 1673–1712: A Study of Epistemological Issues in Late 17th-Century Cartesianism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 13–39.

uncritical acceptance or else a retrograde rejection of their learned sisters. From Elisabeth of Bohemia to the eighteenth-century satirist who wrote *Le Club des dames* lies a forgotten chapter in women's discursive history.

Descartes and Elisabeth

By 1643 the discourse that Timothy J. Reiss has called "analytico-referential" and that I call "objective" or "scientific" was in force if not yet hegemonic.[8] When in that year René Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia began what was to be a six-year correspondence on natural and moral philosophy, it was against the background of a "new science" inscribed in this discourse. The discourse promised immediate signification: through the transparency of the word, the thing (referent) would be apparent. The new science promised mastery over a nature traditionally represented as female which now became an object of conquest by methodical investigation. Evelyn Fox Keller and Carolyn Merchant, among others, have discussed the androcentricity of the new science.[9] Historians have provided little indication that Elisabeth, as a woman, could have had anything to contribute to the development of its discourse. Yet she was fortunate enough to come to maturity in the Cartesian moment, and the letters that she wrote to Descartes suggest new directions and possibilities for a discourse that was still under construction. In the eighteenth century, she was remembered as "the leader of the cartésiennes."[10] The correspondence between Elisabeth and Descartes is a delicate contrapuntal composition in which the princess searchingly questions the epistemological foundations of a new era.

The paths of the philosopher and the princess crossed in Holland. Descartes had sought intellectual peace and freedom in Endegeest, not far from The Hague, seat of the exiled House of Bohemia. In 1643 he moved farther away, to Egmont. Elisabeth (1618–1680) was the

8. See Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

9. Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

10. [Philippe Joseph Caffiaux], *Défenses du beau sexe, ou mémoires historiques, philosophiques, et critiques, pour servir d'apologie aux femmes*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Aux Dépens de la Compagnie, 1753) 2:132.

eldest daughter of Frederick V, the "winter king," who reigned over Bohemia for less than a year in 1619 before losing Bohemia and the Palatinate in the opening phase of the Thirty Years War. Her mother, Elizabeth Stuart, was Mary Stuart's granddaughter and the only daughter of James I of England. Descartes was a welcome figure when he arrived at the exiled queen's court in The Hague, where Constantijn Huygens was among a group of regular scholarly guests. Princess Elisabeth knew Latin and Greek and at least five modern languages and was interested in natural philosophy and metaphysics. Her youngest sister, Sophie (who was to become the mother of England's Hanoverian line), was friendly with Leibniz. After Descartes's death, both Leibniz and Malebranche were among Elisabeth's correspondents. In her later years she devoted herself to piety as the abbess of Herford, a religious house in Westphalia.[11]

The correspondence with Descartes saw Elisabeth through a series of misfortunes. In 1645 her brother Edward decided to marry Anne of Gonzaga, a sister of the queen of Poland, and to convert to Catholicism. Elisabeth was doubly dismayed, since she herself had a decade earlier refused a proposal of marriage from the Polish king, Ladislas IV, because of her religious convictions. A little over a year after Edward's marriage, her younger brother Philip played the principal part in the murder of a Frenchman, L'Espinay, who according to one contemporary account had seduced Elisabeth's sister Louise Hollandine and made improper advances to her mother. Shortly afterward, Elisabeth left The Hague with her sister Henriette for a stay with her relatives in Brandenburg in what was to be the first stage of her definitive departure from Holland. Rumor had it that she was banished by her mother for plotting the crime with Philip. (The more likely story is that she made the trip in order to represent her family's interests to the Elector of Brandenburg.)[12] In 1649 her uncle Charles I of England was beheaded. Elisabeth suffered constantly from various physical complaints, which may have been exacerbated by her personal and political problems.

11. For information on Princess Elisabeth, the main sources are Marguerite Néel, *Descartes et la princesse Elisabeth* (Paris: Elzévir, 1946); "Descartes et la princesse Elisabeth," in AT 12:401–31; Charles Adam, *Descartes, ses amitiés féminines* (Paris: Boivin, 1937); Elizabeth Godfrey [Jessie Bedford, pseud.], *A Sister of Prince Rupert: Elizabeth Princess Palatine and Abbess of Herford* (London and New York: John Lane, 1909); and Alexandre Foucher de Careil, *Descartes et la Princesse Palatine, ou de l'influence du cartésianisme sur les femmes au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1862). Néel's is the most serious and complete discussion of Elisabeth.

12. See AT 12:424.

Like her learned Dutch friend Anna Maria van Schurman, Elisabeth participated from afar in France's Cartesian moment. Even in the scholarly milieu of the Bohemian queen's court, she was considered exceptional. Her sister Sophie said of her: "She was well versed in all the branches of learning and languages, and she kept up a steady acquaintance with Descartes; but her great learning made her a bit absent-minded and often made us laugh."[13] In the dedication of his *Principles of Philosophy* (1644) to Elisabeth, Descartes (rather immodestly) cited as evidence of her superior mind the fact that he had never met anyone who understood his work as well as she. She was "incomparable" in being equally at home in mathematics and metaphysics, he said (AT 9: *Principes*, 22–23).

Descartes was at once a catalyst and a symptom of expanding intellectual horizons. Elisabeth said of his moral reasoning that it was "the most natural" that she had ever encountered and that it "seems to teach me nothing new, except that I can extract from my mind knowledge that I had not previously perceived."[14] From Germany she wrote him that she found it more profitable to spend one hour rereading his works for "cultivating [her] reason" than to spend her whole life reading other works (38: 29 November 1646, 165). In these comments on the natural spur that Descartes gave to self-education through rational discourse, she may have put her finger on a source of the philosopher's enthusiastic reception by educated women. The new science and the excitement of intellectual discovery ushered in a sense that nature was accessible, even to women. Knowledge could, as it were, go public, appear in salons in the vulgar tongue. Amidst this general flurry of interest in Cartesian philosophy, the friendship between Descartes and Elisabeth thrived.

The princess's erudition and intelligence are reflected in her very first philosophical question to Descartes, which called attention to one of the weakest links in his deductive chain, his dualism. How, she wanted to know, can the immaterial soul influence the material body? She confesses that she would almost prefer a material soul to the mystery of such a union (3: 20 June 1643, 11). In navigating between the twin shoals of idealism and materialism, two of the historical high roads traveled by Descartes's dualism, Elisabeth fared better

13. As quoted from Sophie's memoirs in AT 12:403, note a.

14. René Descartes, *Lettres sur la morale: Correspondance avec la princesse Elisabeth, Chanut, et la reine Christine*, ed. Jacques Chevalier (Paris: Boivin, 1935), Letter 18, 16 August 1645, 65. Further references to this edition of the letters will be given in parentheses in the text.

than Descartes's colleague Regius (Henry Le Roy, 1598–1679). Descartes broke off his correspondence and friendship with Regius after a dispute on this subject.[15] Elisabeth's question was to lead not only to an extended epistolary debate but ultimately to Descartes's conception of his *Passions de l'âme* (Passions of the Soul) (1649).

Descartes's reply of June 28 combines deference and respectful paternalism. He explains to Elisabeth that the union of body and mind is one of three primary ideas (notions primitives): mind, body, and the union of the two. Understanding alone (entendement) can conceive of the soul; imagination should supplement understanding for knowledge of the body. The union of mind and body is best perceived by the senses. This union is a concept that is arrived at "without philosophizing" (4: 28 June 1643, 16). It is a notion described by a modern commentator as arising from "prescientific experience."[16] Descartes advises Elisabeth not to overwork her *entendement* in reflections on metaphysics but rather to exercise her imagination and senses too. The most sensible procedure, he suggests, is just to commit to memory basic metaphysical principles. He expresses his admiration that in the midst of all the matters that must occupy a person of "noble mind and birth" (de grand esprit et de grande naissance), she has found time to think about the mind/body problem (4:13–18).

Although initially Elisabeth makes some deprecating references to her "stupidity," she does not hesitate to question even Descartes's most definitive statements. She tenaciously pursues her doubts about dualism through two more of her letters, suggesting that the *Meditations* leave important questions unanswered. As the correspondence unfolds, an authentic dialogue develops between the writers. Elisabeth's solution to the problem of the three circles (one so difficult, said Descartes, that even an angel would need a miracle to solve it)[17] and the evident intellectual challenge that she consistently posed to the philosopher placed him in a quandary. It was as awkward to treat her as a pupil as it was to bow to her as a patron. Descartes's dedication of the *Principles of Philosophy* to Elisabeth could have signified an

15. One account of the quarrel with Regius can be found in Jean-Marie Beyssade's introduction to his recent edition of Descartes's correspondence with Elisabeth. René Descartes, *Correspondance avec Elisabeth et autres lettres*, ed. Jean-Marie Beyssade and Michelle Beyssade (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), 20–23.

16. Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff, "Descartes et la princesse Elisabeth," Bulletin Cartésien 11, *Archives de Philosophie* 45, no. 4 (1982), 9.

17. As quoted by Chevalier from a letter to Pollot of 21 October 1643. See Descartes, *Lettres sur la morale*, 320, n. 8.

expression of his gratitude for her intellectual companionship as much as a politically motivated compliment.[18]

Gender intervenes as an explicit issue only rarely and subtly in the correspondence. After trying out one courtly compliment on the princess about her "superhuman speech" and her body "so similar to artists' paintings of angels" (2: 21 May 1643, 5), Descartes quickly abandoned the genre. Elisabeth does make some infrequent references to the physical weakness of her sex, but she mentions received ideas on women only once in passing. In her letter of 4 December 1649, she says that she is happy to have gotten a glowing description of Queen Christina from Descartes because the image of such a talented woman "frees our sex from the imputation of imbecility and weakness that Messieurs the Pedants habitually assign to it" (223).

There has been much speculation as to the nature of the relationship between Descartes and Elisabeth. Taking a cue from Descartes's own ideas on love, scholars have variously characterized it as an *amour raisonnable* or an *amour intellectuel*.[19] Jean-Marie Beyssade sees Elisabeth as Descartes's "alter ego."[20] Whatever their personal feelings for one another may have been, their epistolary relationship is marked by a tone of complicity. Perhaps the two exiles, one voluntary, the other involuntary, were uniquely qualified to understand one another. Their letters project an early dawning of enlightenment from their small corner of the earth. The philosopher and the princess share a scorn for prejudices and recognize in one another the intellectual liberation of the exceptional individual. Descartes feels "extraordinary joy" in reading her letters, because "I so rarely find good reasoning, not only in conversation with those I frequent in this lonely spot, but also in the books that I consult" (27: 3 November 1645, 114). Elisabeth writes from Krossen about nearby villagers who believe that a terrible plague of flies following an overflow of the Oder is the result of witchcraft (44: May 1647, 185). She sympathizes with Descartes's dismay at the often nasty reception of his work by other

18. I disagree with Londa Schiebinger's characterization of their complex relationship. She sees Elisabeth as assuming the "subordinate posture of a pupil, playing the role of a modest, self-effacing woman," and Descartes as playing "the role of a courtier, responding with the praise due to one of her rank." See Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 46–47.

19. On the idea of "amour raisonnable," see Oeing-Hanoff, "Descartes et la princesse," 22–29. For "amour intellectuel," see Gustave Cohen, *Ecrivains français en Hollande dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Edouard Champion, 1920).

20. Beyssade, *Correspondance*, 30.

scholars. To shield themselves against unenlightened (or malevolent) outsiders, the correspondents sometimes resorted to cryptic language or code. In her letter of 27 December 1645, Elisabeth worries about possible interception of her last letter, in which she deplored her brother's marriage and questioned Descartes about human freedom and God's will: "I'd be annoyed if it fell into the hands of one of those critics who condemn as heresy any doubt about received wisdom" (123).

The appeal to Elisabeth of Descartes's methodical doubt is implicit in the critical scrutiny to which she subjects everything from homely superstition to the philosopher's own ideas. Descartes's concept of a reason shared by all and so without distinction of sex could only have lent further support to her critical enterprise.[21] Methodical doubt, the complement to sex-neutral reason, provided Elisabeth with a discursive space in which to test out her opinions. Because the bright side of Descartes—overwhelming confidence in the power of his method to attain certainty—is so prominent in his letters, the space of doubt may not be immediately visible. Despite the complaints about his detractors, Descartes's communications to Elisabeth are filled with the optimism of the *Discourse on Method*: universal human reason is the source of our greatest and most readily available contentment. The moral precepts that he derives from this variety of stoicism have the democratic connotations of bon sens: in following them, anyone will find happiness (17: 4 August 1645, 62). The universal applicability of Descartes's moral rules and scientific method, both of which were informed by a democratic principle of accessibility to all, constituted perhaps the firmest commitment to date in France to objectivity.

It was Descartes's objectivity that proved problematic to Elisabeth and to several generations of Cartesian women. He positioned himself as if he were somewhere in outer space and pointed to truth and certainty for all to see. Such abstraction of the subject has variously been called "the view from nowhere"[22] and "the angelic eye (I)."[23] At the same time, the individual, subjective "I" is essential to Descartes's reasoning, for, as Jean-Joseph Goux has so persuasively argued, Des-

21. For a similar view of Descartes's appeal for women, see Timothy J. Reiss, "Corneille and Cornelia: Reason, Violence, and the Cultural Status of the Feminine. Or, How a Dominant Discourse Recuperated and Subverted the Advance of Women," *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 18 (1987): 3–41.

22. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford, 1986).

23. Karsten Harries, "Descartes, Perspective, and the Angelic Eye," *Yale French Studies* 49 (June 1973): 28–42.

cartes's method depends first of all on an individual search for truth. The objects of his discoveries were objects *for* an individual's view, which ultimately coincided with a universal, rationalist perspective.[24] The necessary obverse of Descartes's objectivity is a coherent thinking subject. But this subject is locked in contradictions. On the one hand, it has the democratic implications that Elisabeth and other women found so appealing: anyone can fill the place of the individual subject. On the other hand, as Goux has commented, Descartes in claiming for himself the unique position of philosophical spectator, speaks with a certain regal authority, making the thinking subject into a kind of "moi-soleil."[25] Once the method was in place, this subject, in all its ambiguity, was taken for granted. Like an omnisicient narrator, it hid behind its stories for and about the subject.[26]

For Descartes, scientific thought had above all heuristic value, yet there are times when he came dangerously close to reifying it. In one letter, he draws a comparison between the possible adulteration of chemically prepared medicine by a change of formula and the adulteration of *science* by the ignorant. This knowledge sounds suspiciously like an already established corpus of wisdom: "Scientific thought [la Science] in the hands of those who would profess it without a good knowledge of it is much like [a poisoned formula]; for in thinking that they're correcting or adding something to what they've learned they turn it into an error" (39: December 1646, 168).

The chemical image sounds a recurrent dogmatic note. The correspondence is finely balanced between closure and openness. It is Descartes's certitude, his confidence in his philosophy as already constructed, which lets Elisabeth use him as a sounding board for her own questions. To consider these questions, Descartes must admit and accept her doubt, which is after all incorporated into his own method of reasoning. Elisabeth's searching questions can push him to the limit, forcing him either to dogmatism or to the realm of the incomprehensible. His infinite, or, as he would have it, "indefinite" universe, seemed to her difficult to reconcile with the notion of a

24. See Jean-Joseph Goux, "Descartes et la perspective," *L'Esprit Créateur* 25 (Spring 1985): 10–20.

25. Goux, *Descartes*, 16–17.

26. I am not using the terms "subjective," "objective," "subjectivist," and "objectivist" in their strict philosophical sense. By "subjective" I mean the discourse that emanates from the self-conscious, individual thinking and feeling subject; by "objective," the discourse that brackets individual subjectivity in claiming to apply neutrally to everyone or to speak a general truth about nature as object (what Evelyn Fox Keller calls "static objectivity"). Cf. Keller, *Reflections*, 116–17.

special Providence destined for human beings on earth. Descartes's reassurance—it is precisely because God's power is infinite that his protection of us is guaranteed—did not satisfy her.[27] Instead, it led her to press him on the issue of free will (26: 28 October 1645, 111). She was distinctly uncomfortable with his resolution of her doubts about the compatibility of human freedom and the divine will: the human will and the divine will are distinct; God's will is of "another nature" (27: 6 November 1645, 116). "I can't see the compatibility you speak of," Elisabeth responds (28: 30 November 1645, 120).[28]

As the relationship between the two correspondents deepened, Elisabeth took charge of her subjectivity and introduced it as a counterweight to what came to sound more and more like axiomatic pronouncement on Descartes's side. When in the first several letters the discussion centered on mathematics and natural philosophy, this subjectivity took the form of well-placed substantive doubts about the validity of Descartes's theories (how can the soul be immaterial and impart movement to the body?). But when in May of 1645, Descartes and Elisabeth moved into the realm of moral philosophy with a proposed discussion of Seneca, she began to reflect on her own subjectivity and in effect proposed an alternative epistemology.

Descartes's neostoicism rests on the major epistemological premise that res cogitans has a reflexive capacity to disengage itself from the body (to which, we remember, it is attached, while nevertheless distinct) to view it and all that befalls it, and, consequently, all accidents that befall res extensa with the bemused detachment of a spectator at the theater. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes had offered up a variant of the old *theatrum mundi* commonplace.[29] In order to conserve his intellectual freedom to practice methodical doubt, he resolved to be a spectator rather than an actor in the world's theater, the spectacle of his travels.[30] An extended version of this image, which encapsulates a neostoical theme that Descartes was to develop further in the *Passions de l'âme*, is found in the correspondence with Elisabeth.

27. See Elisabeth's letters of 30 September 1645, 94–95, and Descartes's reply of 6 October 1645, 106–7. Cf. Néel, *Descartes et la princesse Elisabeth*, 90–91.

28. Cf. Néel, *Descartes et la princesse Elisabeth*, 95–99. Néel sees Descartes's answer as more like a "constatation" than an explanation and conjectures that Elisabeth saw it as an "admission of ignorance" (101).

29. On the fortunes of the theatrum mundi topos, see Lynda G. Christian, *Theatrum Mundi: The History of an Idea* (New York: Garland, 1987).

30. René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, ed. Etienne Gilson (Paris: J. Vrin, 1966), 84.

Writing of those "noblest souls" who have learned to rise above their passions, Descartes says:

> Considering themselves immortal and capable of attaining great contentment, and, on the other hand, considering that they are joined to mortal, fragile bodies that are subject to many infirmities and will inevitably perish in a few years, they do everything in their power to turn Fortune to their favor in this life. But nevertheless they attach so little value to Fortune seen in the perspective of Eternity, that they view its vicissitudes somewhat the way we view the events of a play. And just as sad or pitiful Stories that we see acted on stage can often provide us with as much diversion as happy ones, even though they bring tears to our eyes, so the noblest souls . . . feel an inner satisfaction with even the most distressing and unbearable things that befall them. (11: 18 May 1645, 42)

The Cartesian theatrum mundi image illustrates how Descartes's dualism leads logically both to an epistemology of the spectacular, to the "angelic eye (I)," and to a neostoical moral position.[31] For it is dispassionate reason that can detach itself sufficiently from the passions and the body to transform itself into a spectator of the self. Reason and will can then dominate the passions, because, as properties of the impassive spectator, they are so distant from passion that the thinking subject all but withdraws into the contemplative eye.

Elisabeth resists Descartes's effort to apply this epistemology to a stoical acceptance of misfortune. The philosopher tries to persuade her that one instance of the soul's influence on the body is the pathological effect of negative emotions. If a fever of which she complains is a result of melancholia, she as a "noble soul" will be capable of reaching the contentment that comes with rising above her feelings (11: 18 May 1645, 40–43). To this exhortation Elisabeth offers an ironic reply. Her female body poses too great an obstacle to recovery. A materialistic account of her illness will do just as well as the philosopher's psychosomatic one:

31. The foundations of Descartes's moral reasoning—the central importance of human will and reason to virtue and happiness—link him to the Stoics. He brings an important modification to the stoicism of antiquity with his emphasis on human freedom. It is for these reasons that I choose to call his position "neostoical." For a good discussion of Descartes's relation to stoicism, see Néel, *Descartes et la princesse Elisabeth*, 80–84.

> I would like you to know that my body is imbued with many of the weaknesses of my sex, that it easily feels the soul's afflictions and doesn't have the strength to recover along with it, being of a constitution that is subject to obstructions and located in an environment that contributes greatly to this susceptibility. For persons who can't do much exercise it doesn't take sadness's long oppression of the heart to block the spleen and infect the rest of the body with its vapors. I imagine that my slow fever and dry cough, which haven't left me yet . . . are caused by that. This is what has made me consent to the physicians' advice to take the waters at Spa in a month, since I've found by experience that the waters get rid of obstructions. But I won't go until I know your opinion, since you have the kindness to want to cure my body by the soul.[32]

In one gesture, Elisabeth refuses both the stoicism figured by the image of the detached observer and, implicitly, the dualism that is its basis. Even though she doesn't depend absolutely on outside factors for her happiness, she tells him, she is unable to view the misfortunes of her family as anything but an "evil" (12: 24 May 1645, 45–46).

Elisabeth's continuing debility and family problems lead her to pursue the subjectivist alternative. To Descartes's emphasis on the will, she counterposes the power of the involuntary: what happens to will and reason when they are eroded by disease or distracted by personal cares? (18: 16 August 1645, 65–66). Descartes, whose position on free will brought him in any case perilously close to heterodoxy, is obliged to reply that he intended his notion of beatitude to apply only to the mentally sound. That is, he is obliged to qualify a universal statement and therefore to modify the objectivist stance: "what I said generally about all men should be understood to apply only to those who have the free use of their reason" (21: 1 September 1645, 79).

The question remains as to how to form correct judgments—those that will ultimately bring the contentment that comes with the conquest of passions. Descartes's reiteration that only knowledge and memory of truth are required takes on the character of a tautology under Elisabeth's insistent questioning, and his final recourse to God begins to look like little more than the escape hatch that some critics thought it was. For Elisabeth, the thinking subject is grounded in the

32. Néel misses the irony of this passage in taking it as evidence that Elisabeth agrees with Descartes's view that the soul influences the body. See Néel, *Descartes et la princesse Elisabeth*, 63.

materiality of the body. She does not understand the effacement of the subject behind abstract reason or the bracketing of subjectivity. When Descartes insists that a certain kind of positive thinking will help to cure her vapors (although he reluctantly admits that the waters too can help obstructions), she digs in her heels. A stoicism that promises victory over the power of the passions and the body is not a realistic solution.

> I confess that I find it difficult to separate from the senses and the imagination things that are continually represented there by speech and by letters, things that I couldn't avoid without shirking my duty. I agree that by removing everything distressing from the idea of something that bothers me (which things I do believe are represented to me by my imagination alone), I would think about it as sanely and would just as quickly resolve it as I do with the feelings that I bring to it. But I've never been able to practice this until after passion has played its part. There is something so surprising about misfortunes, even when foreseen, that I can be mistress of them only after a while. My body gets so disordered by them that I need several days for its recovery, which never go by without some new cause of trouble. (14: 22 June 1645, 52–53)

Elisabeth commonly punctuated her communications with allusions to her family problems and responsibilities. She did not enjoy Descartes's male prerogative of roaming about alone, relatively free from domestic care. Her illness and misfortune constantly reminded her of the concrete conditions of subjectivity. Descartes brought her "consolation" and a buoying confidence in the powers of her own rational faculties. But her genuine admiration for his philosophy remained tempered by what Reiss has called the "responsibility of enunciation," or the enunciating subject's "responsibility for the status of the objects of which it speaks."[33] Descartes's methodical doubt had a welcoming effect and generated the mutual respect of two thinkers for whom *science* was the antidote to "prejudice." In this Cartesian moment the subjectivist strain enhanced the heuristic value of scientific thought and knowledge in general and counterbalanced tendencies toward their reification as monuments already constructed. When Descartes invited Elisabeth to discuss Seneca with him, he let her know how important her comments on the great

33. Reiss, *Discourse*, 42.

moralist would be to him: "aside from the fact that they will be very helpful to me for my own instruction, they will give me the opportunity to correct my comments" (16: 21 July 1645, 59). She took him up on his request to offer criticisms of the draft of his *Passions de l'âme*, which he submitted to her in 1646.[34] It was this space of doubt and exploration that allowed their dialogue to unfold.

A "Beau Trio"

By the close of her correspondence with Descartes, Elisabeth had earned her reputation as a cartésienne. Claude Clerselier's inclusion of Descartes's letters to her in the first volume of his edition of the philosopher's letters (1657) contributed to the establishment of her fame. Although Elisabeth's letters to Descartes had to await publication until 1879, when A. Foucher de Careil brought out his edition, she had acquired exemplary value for cartésiennes of the mid-seventeenth century. There is no evidence, however, that these French women had substantive knowledge of Elisabeth's critique of Descartes. It is all the more striking, then, to find in their writings similar reservations about Cartesian dualism and objectivity. Like Elisabeth, they became known as learned Cartesians at a relatively young age. Like her, they evinced only a qualified admiration of Descartes.

Anne de la Vigne, Marie Dupré, and Catherine Descartes were noted representatives of the worldly Cartesianism of the salons. Dupré was known as "la Cartésienne," Catherine Descartes was dubbed "l'illustre Cartésie" by Madeleine de Scudéry, and Anne de la Vigne was so linked to Cartesianism that it was she to whom Catherine Descartes addressed her poem, "L'Ombre de Descartes" (The Shade of Descartes). The three friends had much in common. Each achieved her learning with the help of male family members.[35] Anne de la Vigne (1634–84) was the daughter of a medical doctor who had formerly taught rhetoric and then rose to great prominence as a physician to Louis XIII and dean of Paris's Faculté de Médecine. Michel de la Vigne is said to have commented on his two children: "When I conceived my daughter I thought it was my son I was conceiving, and

34. See her letter of 25 April 1646, 131–33.

35. Such was the traditional means to a solid education for women. See Gibson, *Women*, 24.

when I conceived my son I thought it was my daughter."[36] It was said of Catherine Descartes (1637–1706), a niece of the philosopher, that her uncle's mind fell to the distaff side. Her father, René's older brother Pierre, was a *conseiller* in the Parlement of Brittany. Marie Dupré (dates unknown, roughly a contemporary of her two friends) had two illustrious uncles in Roland Desmarets, a notable scholar and *littérateur*, and Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, one of the first members of the Académie Française. Roland took charge of her education, teaching her Latin, Greek, rhetoric, poetry, and philosophy—not the scholastic but the modern variety, as Moréri tells us.[37] None of the women married.

The three friends moved in the milieu of the précieuses. Both Catherine Descartes and Anne de la Vigne frequented Madame de Rambouillet's chambre bleue. Catherine Descartes was friendly with Madame de Sévigné and her daughter, Madame de Grignan. The three cartésiennes were regular members of Mademoiselle de Scudéry's salon. Marie Dupré appears in Somaize's seventeenth-century compendium, the *Dictionnaire des précieuses*, and Anne de la Vigne alluded to herself as a précieuse.[38] What exactly constituted a précieuse has been the subject of much recent discussion.[39] It is generally agreed, though, that the précieuse —real or fictional—was inscribed in a cultural-literary code that reserved to a social elite the mysteries of platonic love and spiritual friendship. Hetero- or homosocial spiritual friendship was the alternative that the précieuses proposed to the commodification of the female body in the traditional upper-class marriage for the reproduction of heirs. The discourse of préciosité, built on the correspondences of the Renaissance, meta-

36. Titon du Tillet, *Le Parnasse français*, 2 vols. (Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard fils, 1732), 1:369.

37. Louis Moréri, *Le Grand Dictionnaire historique*, rev. ed. (Paris: Les Libraires Associés, 1759), 4:295.

38. See the last stanza of her "Réponse à une lettre galante qui lui fut ecrite des Champs Elizées, aprés une grande maladie dont elle pensa mourir," in Le R. P. Bouhours, *Recueil de vers choisis* (Paris: George & Louis Josse, 1693), 15. Hereafter referred to as Receuil Bouhours.

39. See Domna C. Stanton, "The Fiction of *Préciosité* and the Fear of Women," *Yale French Studies* 62 (Fall 1981): 107–34. For other recent discussions of the précieuses and préciosité, see Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Y. Fukui, *Le Raffinement précieux dans la poésie française du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Nizet, 1964); Roger Lathuillère, *La Préciosité: Etude historique et linguistique* (Geneva: Droz, 1966); and Dorothy Anne Liot Backer, *Precious Women: A Feminist Phenomenon in the Age of Louis XIV* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

phorically recast the conditions of the aristocrats' everyday life. The pseudonyms taken by salon habitués transformed them into pastoral or ancient counterparts: Madeleine de Scudéry was "Sapho," Valentin Conrart "Théodamas," and Paul Pellisson "Acante." In real life as in the novels in which they appeared (such as those of Madeleine de Scudéry), the living person had to be read through her or his corresponding persona.

Most of the précieuses were literate. The epithet "docte" or "savante" (learned), however, was reserved for only a minority among them. Ideals of learning underwent considerable change in the seventeenth century. Especially by the 1660s, when the three friends flourished, the Renaissance model of classical, literary knowledge started to give way to a scholarly model comprised not only of belles-lettres but also of astronomy, physics, and current natural philososphy. Molière's notorious femme savante, Philaminte, was addicted to astronomy. Both the précieuse and the savante came in for heavy satirical treatment at the hands of their (mostly male) contemporaries.[40] The savante tended to become an even more visible target in a social environment that did not in general support learning for women. Anna Maria van Schurman, who knew Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldee, Syriac, and Ethiopic, was an international curiosity. Members of royalty, like Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia or Queen Christina of Sweden, could afford to be indifferent to the reaction they provoked. In the mid-seventeenth century the savante found herself at the center of a heated debate on the kind of learning (if any) that might be acceptable or appropriate for women.[41]

Cartesianism added fuel to the fire. Controversial in its challenge to the reigning scholastic philosophy, it was doubly so for women. In siding with the Cartesian opposition, they assumed the burdens of both unconventional femininity and the maverick "Moderns" who challenged the authority of classical antiquity in philosophy, rhetoric, and literature.[42] We may well wonder what in Descartes's philosophy

40. The most famous of these satires are Molière's comedy *Les Femmes savantes* (1672) and Boileau's tenth satire, "Contre les femmes" (1694).

41. Carolyn Lougee tends to identify the précieuse with the savante, as did many of their contemporaries. Lougee is correct in viewing the seventeenth-century ideal of feminine learning as inseparable from standards of *mondanité*. Very few of the précieuses, however, possessed enough learning to qualify as truly savante (learned). See Lougee, *Paradis*, 27–30.

42. Antoine Adam doesn't want to identify the "Moderns" with Cartesians, because some Moderns after 1670 were antipathetic to Descartes's philosophy. To restrict one's notion of "Modern" to the famous Quarrel between the Ancients and the Mod-

prompted women to take this risk. But the salon, presided over, if not invented by, women, provided an intellectual haven.

Descartes's dualism was a further attraction for women. His dualism can be read as an endorsement of either the separability or the inseparability of mind and body. Seventeenth-century literature by and about women was generally consistent with the first possibility and included variations on the theme "the mind has no sex." With the diffusion of Cartesianism, this phrase became a feminist rallying cry. The concept of a soul freed from bodily and therefore sexual impediments lent philosophical weight to the commonplace. Poullain de la Barre used it as the linchpin of his Cartesian arguments in support of women.[43] The premise of my discussion of the writings under consideration here is that they reflect the first reading. Not only do the texts themselves support this contention; the values and outlook of the précieuses would naturally have inclined them to such an interpretation, which would in turn have reinforced their views. Both neoplatonism and neostoicism combined to aid the précieuses in their quest for relationships that would free them from the obligations and prejudices attached to their female bodies. A dualism that emphasized the separability of soul and body lent dignity to the intellectual enterprise of the salon and validated women as thinking subjects.

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erns, however, is to adopt the short and narrow view. Descartes's philosophy sounded the death knell of scholasticism and paved the way for an enduring "modern" epistemology and science. See Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française*, 3:23–24. On the admittedly problematic alliance of Moderns, Cartesians, and women, see Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours* (Paris: des femmes, 1977), 168. Georges Ascoli unhesitatingly connects modernism, feminism, and Cartesianism. See his "Essai sur l'histoire des idées féministes en France du XVIe siècle à la Révolution," *Revue de Synthèse Historique* 13, no. 2 (1906): 167–69.

43. See Poullain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (Paris: Jean Du Puis, 1673). On the implications for women of Descartes's departure from Aristotelian theories of sexual difference, see Schiebinger, *Mind*, 171–72. Cf. Reiss, "Corneille and Cornelia," 10, and Reynier, *Femme au XVIIe siécle*, 116–17. I am very grateful to Amélie O. Rorty for her comments on an early draft of several sections of this chapter. Although she and I still undoubtedly disagree, our discussions have been an invaluable help to me in my consideration of the relation of women to Cartesian dualism. I am also grateful to her for having made available to me a draft of her article "Descartes on Thinking with the Body," in *Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). This essay articulates what I will call the inseparability position on Cartesian dualism. See also her "Cartesian Passions and the Union of Mind and Body," in *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 513–34. At the other end of the spectrum is Susan Bordo's *Flight to Objectivity*. A highly useful discussion of the separability/inseparability question is to be found in Marjorie Grene, *Descartes* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985), 23–52.

Nevertheless, it was precisely Descartes's dualism, read in the first sense, that the salonnières also contested. As allied to his mechanism and objectivity, this dualism focused their ambivalence to Cartesian philosophy. On the one hand, Cartesian dualism seemed to support them as thinking subjects; on the other, it seemed to drain the thinking subject of all feeling and emotion connected to the body and to reduce the body to a mere machine. Catherine Descartes, Marie Dupré, and Anne de la Vigne stood at a critical distance from the philosophy that they undoubtedly admired. It is this simultaneous attraction and resistance that puts their designation as cartésiennes in question.

Like most of their contemporary cartésiennes, the three women left practically nothing in the way of scholarly writing. Whereas male Cartesians, such as Jacques Rohault, Claude Clerselier, and Pierre-Sylvain Régis, gave lectures and wrote treatises, the bulk of the three women's writing was poetry in the précieux vein and personal correspondence. This omission is all the more notable in light of the fact that in the rare instances where they do discuss Descartes they do not present themselves as docile disciples.

It is perhaps because these three cartésiennes couched their critique of Descartes in the précieux language of the salons that their contribution has gone unrecognized. Characterized by metaphor, veiled allusion, hyperbole, and circumlocution, this language belonged more to the Renaissance episteme of resemblance than it did to the new analytic language of Cartesianism. The older discourse, in which signifier and signifed were mediated by metaphor, coexisted for a time in the seventeenth century with the discourse of Cartesian objectivity, in which the signifier claimed transparent representation of the signified. The persistence of the older discourse in précieux language alongside the new relation of signifer to signified marked a dialectical moment in which the values of objectivity and transparent truth had not yet displaced a cultural system for which truth was always metaphorical. Précieux language has come to be considered foreign to modern rationality. Yet it seems to have been used indifferently for anything from salon games of love to Cartesian philosophy. Such blanket usage makes it difficult to assess the value of Cartesianism for the beau monde. How seriously, for example, should we take the fact that Madame de Sévigné's daughter referred to Descartes as her (spiritual) "father"? Madame de Sévigné's good friend Jean Corbinelli enthused in typically aristocratic style to Sévigné's cousin, Bussy-Rabutin: "During your stay in Paris, I advise you to learn Descartes's philosophy. Mesdemoiselles Bussy [Bussy-Rabutin's daughters] will

learn it faster than any game. For my part, I find it delicious, not only because it disabuses us of a million commonly held errors but also because it teaches us how to think properly. Without it, we would die of boredom in this province."[44]

It was in the idiom of metaphor and analogy that learned précieuses framed their thoughts on Cartesian philosophy. Their critique of Descartes is informed by an epistemic conflict between a metaphorical and an objective concept of truth. To a large extent, their ambivalence toward Cartesian dualism depends on this tension. Yet the tension also suggests possibilities of conciliating the conflicting notions in a feminist alternative.

When in 1673 Catherine Descartes sent to Anne de la Vigne her poem "L'Ombre de Descartes," she intended it as a compliment both to her friend and to her uncle. In the poem she invited La Vigne to spread the Cartesian word in order to help combat the misunderstanding and prejudice surrounding the new philosophy. La Vigne replied with a polite refusal. Their poetic exchange, conceived more in admiration than in criticism of Descartes, is illustrative of the way in which a précieux language may have concealed commitment to the logic and clarity of Cartesian truth. Perhaps this language served also as a mask behind which the learned woman could hide from public view.

Love is the organizing metaphor of Catherine Descartes's poem. She adopts the persona of her uncle and urges La Vigne openly to avow her love for him. The poem ends with Descartes's humorously plaintive self-defense: "Is there anyone as worthy as myself? And, entre nous, do you see / Any lover more illustrious than I and worthier of you?"[45] The seemingly flippant conceits announce several important themes. The poet imagines a union of Cartesian clarity and feminine beauty, and so, ultimately, a new philosophical union of the masculine and the feminine. In adopting the language of love, she implicitly challenges a dualism that would make of emotion an object of investigation for the dispassionate mind.

The poem's Descartes describes himself as a militant Modern raising the banner of Truth against scholastic "ignorance." Of scholastic philosophy he says,

44. Letter of 23 August 1673, in Madame de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, ed. Duchêne, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1972–78), 1:589–90.

45. Catherine Descartes, "L'Ombre de Descartes," in Recueil Bouhours, 27–30, esp. 30.

This proud one, with her Aristotle
Is still the fad of today's scholars;
Everything said against her is a novelty,
And without further examination should be dropped;
As if the errors of those great men merited respect in our time;
And ceasing to be errors by their antiquity,
Finally proscribed truth. (28)

Through the intervention of La Vigne, "novelty," which in the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns could assume a distinctly pejorative tone, will give way to truth: "Great truths, which seemed new, / Will henceforth appear clear, solid, beautiful" (28). In uniting philosophical truth and feminine beauty, Catherine Descartes plays on the conventional allegorical portrait of truth as a woman: "When truth comes from such lovely lips, / It convinces the stubbornest mind" (29).

The poet's vision of Descartes clearing away the prejudices of earlier times recaptures the philosopher's own view of himself as a lone herald of enlightenment.[46] Catherine Descartes places herself in solidarity with her uncle as his mouthpiece and with her friend as his champion, thereby proposing an alliance of men and women in the service of truth. The errors and prejudices of outworn philosophy to which the poet refers conceivably include those that theorized the mental inferiority of women from a supposedly inferior body. So although the poet initially casts her friend as Descartes's disciple, she has La Vigne emerge ultimately as his equal:

To false dogma destroyed and errors stifled
You will raise me [Descartes] a hundred illustrious trophies;
By your illustrious offices my writings, in turn,
Will become the love of all true scholars.
I see our two names joined together,
Bringing to posterity my glory with yours;
And I can already hear it said in many climes,
'Descartes and La Vigne have instructed the world.' (29)

The appearance of the word "love" (amour) in these lines prepares us for the final conceit, Descartes as La Vigne's suitor. The precious

46. This view is especially apparent in the *Discourse on Method* and in Descartes's correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia.

language also carries a deeper layer of meaning in which truth is beauty and knowledge is love. Cartesian truth is "clear" and "solid," but it is also "beautiful" and must be nurtured with love. For it is only with loving attention to its diffusion, the poet suggests, that error can be conquered. One senses in these lines a passion akin to the "dynamic objectivity" that Evelyn Fox Keller has glimpsed as a possible feature of feminized science. Subjective experience is not effaced before the object of knowledge, but is enlisted to serve, in Keller's words, as "a form of attention to the natural world that is like one's ideal attention to the human world: it is a form of love."[47] Here the poet revises a dualism that frees the mind not only from the fetters of the body but also from the distractions and distortions of the emotions. She challenges what Susan Bordo has identified in Descartes's *Meditations* as the "purification of the mind" and the "transcendence of the body."[48]

The dualism underlying this poem has a twofold, conflicting value. Allied on the one hand to the methodical doubt that demystifies prejudice and error, it offers women the liberating message that "the mind has no sex."[49] On the other hand, the mind severed from body and purified of emotion results in what I will call the "spectator-subject," one that in its detachment and impartiality is antithetical to the thinking and feeling subject addressed in "L'Ombre de Descartes."[50]

The philosopher's shade exhorts Anne de la Vigne to wage the battle for truth with the heart as well as with the mind. As a final paean to La Vigne, the poet ranks her above Elisabeth of Bohemia, "wise Elisabeth, the glory of the Empire," in the roster of illustrious women surrounding Descartes. Catherine Descartes expects no less of her friend than the "miracle" of bringing about universal intellectual harmony: "I expect from you a special miracle. / That at last truth will find no more obstacle, / And despite error and prejudice, / The entire universe will hold but one opinion" (29). But she fears that her hopes will be frustrated by her friend's reluctance to display her erudition. The poet, interestingly, views this hesitation as a failed commitment, and, ultimately, as a failure of love. She urges La Vigne

47. See Keller, *Reflections*, 117.

48. Bordo, *Flight to Objectivity*, 75–95.

49. It is this aspect of Cartesian doubt that Ruth Perry stresses in her "Radical Doubt and the Liberation of Women," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18 (Summer 1985): 472–93.

50. Cf. Bordo, *Flight to Objectivity*, 88.

to abandon her silence and secrecy and to give free rein to eloquence, for she should "not scruple to garner love" for Descartes's philosophy.

Anne de la Vigne's refusal, couched in her "Réponse à L'Ombre de Descartes" (Reply to the Shade of Descartes), suggests that the social stigma attached to learned women was largely responsible for the lack of formal writings on Descartes by the cartésiennes. La Vigne was generally praised for her "feminine modesty," as were her two friends. When Esprit Fléchier, the future bishop of Nîmes, asked La Vigne to distribute his Latin poetry to some of their mutual friends, she initially demurred, with a hint that she didn't want to show off her knowledge (albeit imperfect) of Latin.[51] It was only after some coaxing by Fléchier that she consented to run the risk of being labeled a "dona Bachellera" (lady graduate). Of Marie Dupré, Bussy-Rabutin said, "Her modesty has touched me more than her knowledge. A girl who can speak four languages, who is a master versifier, and who boasts of nothing is a marvel one can't overestimate." Madeleine de Scudéry was impressed that a woman as intelligent and accomplished as Catherine Descartes should be so modest.[52]

The aristocratic ideal of *honnêteté* which prevailed in the social world of Catherine Descartes, Anne de la Vigne, and Marie Dupré proscribed pedantry for both sexes. La Rochefoucauld's celebrated definition of an *honnête homme* as one who prides himself on nothing was appropriate to the life of the salon, where conversation had above all esthetic and social value. Pedants were clumsy and bourgeois. Corbinelli's view of Cartesian philosophy as a salon game diverting enough to while away time in the provinces is entirely consistent with the ideal of honnêteté. The display of learning was so much more unacceptable for a woman than for a man that the adjective *honnête* carries a very different meaning in the feminine—"chaste" (cf. "honest" in the English of the period). According to de Scudéry, a learned woman at court, far from the Latin Quarter where she be-

51. See Abbé A[ntonin] Fabre, *La Jeunesse de Fléchier*, 2 vols. (Paris: Didier, 1882) 2:108–9, and [Jules-Antoine] Taschereau, "Correspondance galante de Fléchier," *Revue Rétrospective* 1 (1833): 242–54, esp. 252–54. Fléchier commented elsewhere on her modesty; see Fabre, 2:71.

52. On Marie Dupré, see Bussy-Rabutin's letter to Conrart, 24 September 1669, in Roger de Rabutin, comte de Bussy, *Correspondance*, ed. Ludovic Lalanne, rev. ed., 6 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1858–59), 1:203. Mademoiselle de Scudéry's remark about Catherine Descartes is quoted by Alain Niderst in his *Madeleine de Scudéry, Paul Pellisson, et leur monde* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), 493.

longed, would be a "monster"—literally on show, displayed as a curiosity.[53]

Madeleine de Scudéry, who set the tone for the society of the three friends, tried to steer a middle course in the debate on the education of women. Her ideal woman was not a femme savante:

> I would like it said of a person of my sex that she knows a hundred things of which she makes no boast, that her mind is extremely enlightened, that she has an exquisite knowledge of beautiful literature, that she speaks well, writes properly, and that she has savoir-faire, but I wouldn't like it said of her that she's a learned lady. It's not that she who refuses to be dubbed savante can't know as much and more than she who has been given that terrible name, but that she knows how to make better use of her mind, and that she has learned how to conceal cleverly what the other so inappropriately displays.[54]

The compromise of the learned lady who hides her learning was promoted by Molière in his *Femmes savantes* (1672), but for Madeleine de Scudéry and the women in her circle, it was the locus of much tension. Madeleine de Scudéry was a woman of great learning, and she had a profound admiration for the famed learned ladies of her day, such as Anna van Schurman, Sibylla Ursula, and Queen Christina of Sweden.[55] In her work, the compromise of modest concealment seems an implausible resolution of underlying conflict. "Sapho" vehemently protested the sexual division of labor that assigned beauty to women and arts, letters, and learning to men. Waging war was the only legitimate sex-linked task, she said.[56]

53. [Madeleine] de Scudéry, *Les Femmes illustres, ou les harangues héroïques, avec les veritables portraits de ces heroïnes, tirez des medailles antiques*, 2 vols. (Paris: Antoine de Sommaville, Augustin Courbé, 1644–54), 1: dedicatory epistle. As in the case of much of Mademoiselle de Scudéry's work, the *Femmes illustres* was signed by her brother Georges. He may well have written the dedicatory epistle.

54. [Madeleine] de Scudéry, *Artamène, ou Le Grand Cyrus*, 10 vols. (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1654), 10:359. Further references are to this edition unless otherwise noted.

55. See Rathery and Boutron, *Mademoiselle de Scudéry: Sa Vie et sa correspondance* (Paris: Léon Techener, 1873), 107, 204–6. A recently discovered correspondence between de Scudéry and Sibylla Ursula attests to de Scudéry's respect for the very learned German aristocrat. On this correspondence see Barbara Krajewska, "Du Nouveau sur la correspondance de Mlle de Scudéry," *Essays in French Literature* 25 (November 1988): 11–14.

56. See de Scudéry, *Les Femmes illustres*, 1:424–27, 431–32.

Anne de la Vigne phrases her refusal to the shade's entreaties in Catherine Descartes's poem in terms worthy of Madeleine de Scudéry's approval: "I have neither the appearance nor the manners of an old Doctor; / And don't feel that I'm fit to give lessons."[57] It requires more understanding than she possesses, she says, to establish "great truths." "I leave it to our Scholars to display them, / And I learn them only not to speak of them" (31). Nevertheless, beneath her compliant exterior, a consciousness of what Juliet Mitchell has called "social coercion" creeps in.[58] La Vigne's answer to the question put to her by Descartes's shade, "Why do you make a crime of showing [your estime for me]?" is typical of the learned lady's enlightened bow to social pressure in the early modern period. For La Vigne, as for so many others, the risk wasn't worth the effort:

> I know that the loveliest, most forceful eloquence
> Is often not worth a modest silence;
> That for us custom has made it almost a duty
> To speak rarely and to know nothing;
> And that if perchance a lady follows other maxims
> She should hide them as one hides crimes.
> Whether it be a well-founded custom
> Or only the law of the mightiest:
> Without doubt she'll find it surer and wiser
> To submit to this tiresome practice. (31)

As La Vigne reweaves the threads of Catherine Descartes's argument, her impatience at the restrictions on women's education shows through the surface of her compliance. Certain women, she says, exceptional for either their mind or their rank, can dispense with social restrictions on learning. Did "wise Elisabeth," for example, submit to such "bizarre laws?" Would this capitulation have been worthy of Descartes? (31–32)

Finally, La Vigne wants the glory of celebrating Descartes to go to others—to Elisabeth of Bohemia, but especially to Descartes's male friends. The pattern of stress in the French alexandrines (to which my emphasis corresponds) highlights the importance of a *male* agent in diffusing Cartesian philosophy:

57. "Réponse de Mademoiselle de la Vigne à L'Ombre de M. Descartes," in Recueil Bouhours, 30–32, esp. 31.

58. Juliet Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 27–28.

I leave to your *friends* [amis] the pleasure and the glory [of immortalizing your name]

. . . . . .

By them soon the Court, the Bar, the Sorbonne
Will believe your doctrine alone is good;
By them all your writings, your scholarly treatises
Will be read openly, without contestation:
By them a thousand successes

. . . . . .

Will have made famous both
Your deep knowledge and their love for you.[59]

In one move, La Vigne leaves to men (or to very exceptional women) two of the most problematic spheres of activity for women, love and learning. It is only to repudiate Catherine Descartes's vision of love and knowledge united in women that she takes up her friend's conceit of love: "For me not even the love of a dead man is permitted; / Pure as it is, I could be blamed; / There is always some shame in loving" (32). The précieuses were famed for their "refusal of love."[60] Molière's comedy *Les Précieuses ridicules* (1659) turns on this idea. Although to observers in some circles, identified by Carolyn Lougee as antifeminist, the précieuses appeared to be loose women, the ideal of platonic and spiritual love that was articulated in fashionable salons was probably taken quite seriously in the de Scudéry circle. It was certainly compatible with the Cartesian "transcendence of the body."[61] In one reading of Anne de la Vigne's poem, then, she would appear to be more Cartesian than the Cartesians, the purest of the

59. Receuil Bouhours, 32. The original French is worth citing:

Pour porter votre nom au temple de Memoire,
J'en laisse à vos amis le plaisir & la gloire:
J'en connois quelques-uns dignes de cet emploi,
Qui s'en font un honneur, qui s'en font une loi;
Par eux bientot la Cour, le Barreau, la Sorbonne
Croiront votre doctrine & la seule & la bonne;
Par eux tous vos Ecrits, tous ces savans Traitez
Seront lus hautement sans etre contestez:
Par eux mille succez dont le bonheur extreme
Passera votre espoir, passera vos voeux meme,
Rendront egalement celebres parmi nous,
Votre profond savoir, & leur amour pour vous.

60. See Lathuillère, *Préciosité*, 50–60.

61. On the antifeminist view of love in the salons of the précieuses, see Lougee, *Paradis*, 70–84.

pure. Her refusal of love *and* learning and her attachment of shame to both mark an extreme reaction (but one that may have been typical) to the dilemma of the learned lady in her social milieu.

Certainly La Vigne's interest in Descartes made her vulnerable to joking and perhaps even to deeper criticism by men. Fléchier, who was after all one of her greatest admirers, teased her about her penchant for Cartesian philosophy in a précieux poetic dialogue addressed to her. He somewhat cruelly transcribed for her benefit a conversation about her poem that took place at the home of his fellow prelate, Jacques Bénigne Bossuet. Bossuet was on this occasion host to an eminent group of churchmen and others, including Géraud de Cordemoy, a Cartesian and member of the Académie Française. Fléchier relates that Bossuet decided to entertain his guests by reading them the exchange of poems between Catherine Descartes and Anne de la Vigne. He writes: "Some said that you had a fine flair; that the particles of your brain [an allusion to Descartes's corpuscular theory] . . . I beg your pardon. I've forgotten what the particles of a bel esprit's brain should be like according to your opinion." La Vigne, according to her correspondent's report, was somewhat condescendingly praised for "your taste for the ancients, your wit, your philosophical ability, your wisdom, your modesty." Fléchier continues to mock Cartesian philosophy (and, implicitly, La Vigne) in his description of what ensued. After an outing to the Cabinet du Roi, the guests returned tired: "the machine wanted amusement, but the thinking substance was a little weary. . . . M. Régnier spoke only of mind, of sensation, and of little particles, after which we had lunch: there were some sensations, sensations peppered with philosophy."[62]

Anne de la Vigne's silence on a subject that was obviously of great importance to her is strikingly repeated in the life of her friend Marie Dupré. The woman called "la Cartésienne" seems to have left no writings at all on Descartes. The meager amount of poetry and correspondence that she did leave demonstrates how the language of a précieuse could serve both to cloak her learning and to assert the value of her intellect.

Dupré is the most elusive of the three friends. She was supposedly born in Paris around the middle of the seventeenth century,[63] and she was still alive in January 1707, when Esprit Fléchier addressed a letter

62. Fabre, *Jeunesse de Fléchier*, 2:102–7.

63. Abbé [Claude-François] Lambert, *Histoire littéraire du règne de Louis XIV*, 3 vols. (Paris: Prault fils, 1751), 3:11.

to her. Fléchier may have been introduced to both Dupré and La Vigne by Valentin Conrart, the secretary of the Académie Française.[64] Dupré led an extremely active social life. She was in close contact with Madeleine de Scudéry, Conrart, Pellisson, Daniel Huet, and Father Rapin, as well as with Fléchier. She was also on good terms with Louis XIV's cousin, Mademoiselle de Montpensier. Madeleine de Scudéry's sister-in-law (Georges's wife) called Dupré her very best friend.[65] Dupré carried on a correspondence with Bussy-Rabutin for about twenty-five years, from 1667 to 1692. She encouraged the friendship of Bussy and Father Rapin, and it was through her that Conrart and Fléchier became acquainted with Bussy, who, although Louis XIV had exiled him to the family property in Burgundy for imprudence, was nonetheless an important person to know. Fléchier felt the force of his influence when, through the good offices of Marie Dupré, Bussy pushed for the prelate's admission to the Académie Française. It was through Dupré that Bussy met Catherine Descartes, whose "Ombre" he read with approbation.[66] The anti-Cartesian Daniel Huet called her "serious and austere," and in fact when rumor had it that Pellisson's conversion to Catholicism might not have held up at his death, she anxiously sought reassurance from Bossuet.[67]

Dupré's poetry and letters generally show us a lighter side. Until what must have been well into her middle age, she was exchanging clever *bouts-rimés* (verses set to fixed rhymes) with Bussy. Her favorite theme was the "refusal of love." Bussy thought that her erudition would reinforce her negative feelings about love. In his letter to her of 5 February 1692, he says, "I learned with much pleasure, Mademoiselle, that you're occupied in reading the works of the ancients; that will . . . in no way diminish the irreconcilable hatred you've sworn against love."[68] This distaste dated from the earliest days of their correspondence, when she began to send him bouts-rimés titled

64. This is Fabre's plausible conjecture (*Jeunesse de Fléchier*, 1:252). Another view is that Fléchier and La Vigne met at the salon of Madame de Rambouillet. See [Augustin-François] Théry, "Recherches sur la vie et les oeuvres d'une précieuse," in *Mémoires lus à la Sorbonne: Histoire, philologie, et sciences morales* (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1866), 261–91, esp. 267.

65. Letter from Madame de Scudéry to Bussy-Rabutin, 8 September 1670, in Bussy, *Correspondance*, 1:312.

66. Fabre, *Jeunesses de Fléchier*, 1:256–57. See also Dupré's letter of 22 June 1670 to Bussy, in Bussy, *Correspondance*, 1:282–83; and Bussy's reply to Corbinelli's letter of 27 July 1673 in ibid., 2:291.

67. Fabre, *Jeunesse de Fléchier*, 1:266–69.

68. Bussy, *Correspondance*, 6:532–33.

"Contre l'amour" (Against Love). Verses in which she dismisses Cupid from her life typify the spirit of this poetry: "I like to laugh, and that god saddens everyone; / I like to run about, and he keeps people home."[69] In June of 1671 she wrote scornfully of the marriage of a forty-five-year-old woman "without property, beauty, or wit. It's no lie that love is blind; aren't I right to despise it? What helps to keep me out of its clutches is the example of men and women it leads to commit so many foolish things. In its place I've filled my heart with friendship, and I'm hardly better off, for when I lose someone I like, I suffer almost as much as do young ladies who lose their lovers." In September 1670 she had written to Bussy, "I agree with you that friendship as well as love has its sorrows; but it doesn't carry the same shame."[70]

Dupré seems to attach as much shame to love as La Vigne did to learning. Indeed "feminine modesty" prohibited well-born women from indulging in either. Love, however, was possibly a more acceptable and certainly a more usual literary theme than philosophy for a woman writer of the time. La Vigne's sonnet "Passion Conquered" (La Passion vaincue) takes up the refrain of Dupré's refusal of love yet perhaps hides a knowledge of Descartes in the manner de Scudéry advised. The poet tells of a jilted shepherdess who has decided to drown herself. In the second tercet, however, she changes her mind. The poem ends with a witty play on a line from Corneille's *Le Cid* (1637): "We have but one honor, there are so many mistresses!" (Nous n'avons qu'un honneur, il est tant de maîtresses!) (III.vi.1058). La Vigne's variant is "There are so many shepherds, and I've but one life."[71] For a devaluation of love that is meant to devalue women, La Vigne substitutes a devaluation of *men* and love. "Passion Conquered" places the heroic Cornelian transcendence of personal passion in a feminine context.[72] It also recalls Descartes's emphasis on the role of free will in regulating the passions, which is a central theme of his *Passions de l'âme*. Descartes's treatise may have held a special appeal for the women in the de Scudéry circle, who followed the novelist's lead in preferring a spiritualized friendship or *tendre amitié* (tender friendship) to love.

The salon was a privileged place for the flowering of female homosocial friendships. Descartes's dualism and his theory of the passions

69. Letter of 13 November 1669, in ibid., 1:223.

70. Ibid., 1:416–17, 315–16.

71. Recueil Bouhours, 52.

72. For a discussion of this transcendence in Corneille, see Serge Doubrovsky, *Corneille et la dialectique du héros* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).

rationalized these friendships. Not only did his disembodied soul permit women to overcome their perceived sexual inferiority; the active will, the highest function of the Cartesian soul, offered the possibility of dominating disabling passions.[73] Neoplatonic tendre amitié was applied to hetero- as well as to homosocial relations, but the heterosocial variety was marked by inequality. The précieux code of galanterie, for example, was used in correspondence between men and women, but the limits of propriety were more quickly reached by women than by men. Men, after all, continued to play their conventional role of pursuer. Fléchier's letters to La Vigne are sprinkled with sexual innuendos that decorum would not allow her to return in kind. When at the future bishop's urgings, she chose the role of a "tender character" for amateur theatricals (the Judith of a playwright whose identity is not specified), he joked: "You're proud, Mademoiselle, you're a prude. I don't advise you to enter into such an undertaking: it might be costlier for you than for the tyrant [Holophernes]. Maybe he wouldn't lose his life, and you could lose something else that good girls like you value as much."[74]

The salon lent new dignity to female friendship. Since the time of classical antiquity, men had placed a greater value on male homosocial friendships than on heterosexual relationships. The sexual double standard further reduced the emotional importance of any one woman in a man's life. Montaigne's wife plays a marginal role in his *Essays;* his friend, Etienne de La Boétie, who died young, plays a central one. For women, of course, marriage was central. As La Vigne turned the tables on the traditional male valuation of sexual relationships with women, so the salon turned the tables on the valuation of homosocial friendship. (We don't know if the female friendships among the salonnières in the de Scudéry circle were also homosexual.) It is clear that female friendship empowered the woman writer. In a brief extant prose and verse correspondence, Catherine Descartes and Madeleine de Scudéry write of their own friendship in a tone alternately tender and flirtatious.[75] La Vigne and Dupré ex-

73. According to Descartes, passions are "naturally good" when they are not excessive. Like his "bon sens," they need to be used well. His "general remedy against the passions" is to detach our thoughts from bodily sensations so that will can dictate rational resistance. See Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme* (1649), art. 211, AT 11:485–88.

74. Fabre, *Jeunesse de Fléchier*, 2:71–72.

75. See Rathery and Boutron, *Mademoiselle de Scudéry*, 393–403. Rathery and Boutron reprinted this incomplete version of the correspondence from Cassagne and Furetière, *Essais de lettres familières sur toutes sortes de sujets* (Paris, 1690). They were printed in entirety in Laurent Bordelon, *Les Malades de belle humeur, ou lettres divertissantes écrites de Chaudray* (Paris, 1697). Rathery and Boutron can be supplemented by

pressed the depth of their friendship in verse as loving as that addressed by men to women.

In 1672, La Vigne composed an ode celebrating one of the king's military triumphs in the Dutch War. As an acknowledgment of her literary skill, Dupré sent her an anonymous ode attached to an enameled gold lyre and wrapped up in a coconut box. Such compliments were not unusual in the social world of the two friends. The year before, on condition of anonymity, La Vigne had complied with the request of a group of women friends to write Madeleine de Scudéry a congratulatory poem for her exceptional victory in winning the first competition in eloquence sponsored by the Académie Française with her "Discours de la gloire" (Discourse on Glory). La Vigne sent her the ode fastened with multi-colored ribbons to a gold laurel wreath enameled in green and set in a pretty box.[76] In both cases, the veil of anonymity was quickly penetrated. When La Vigne penned her reply to the "illustrious author of the ode to Climène [La Vigne], whoever he may be," she undoubtedly had Dupré in mind. She promises the poet "tendresse" if (s)he will come forth before it's too late. The last two stanzas are a shy overture to the beloved:

> Ashamed someday at pledging myself
> To the tender friendship that I promise today,
> I fear forming the wish in my changed heart
> Never to see you again. Already I secretly sigh at my promise;
> I feel that to keep it will prove too much for me,
> And if you give me the time to retract it;
> I cannot answer for it.

The madrigal to "Iris" that La Vigne appended to these verses hints at her awareness that the "unknown" poet is a woman (by using masculine forms, both authors maintain the pretense that the poet is a man):

> Will your austerity excuse me,
> If I dare to speak so tenderly to the unknown man ["inconnu"]?
> Entre nous, it's only a ruse
> To get him to drop his disguise quickly.

Gustave L. Van Roosbroeck, who supplies the missing material in "The 'Unpublished' Poems of Mlle de Scudéry and Mlle Descartes," *Modern Language Notes* 40 (March 1925), 155–58.

76. See Théry, "Recherches," 276–86.

My promise is a little bold;
But in making it, Iris, I run no risk.
I'll tell him, if he comes, that I regret it,
And you come too late.

The switch from the third to the second person pronoun in the last line gives Dupré an opening, and in a brief, precious conceit she "reveals" her identity:

Use some other ruse;
Your promise is so important
That I won't have faith in anyone's word.
To earn this reward,
Is there a gentleman [honnête homme] in France,
Who won't say, it's I?[77]

Some twenty years after composing her "Ombre de Descartes," Catherine Descartes wrote a "Relation," or account, of her uncle's death. In two decades, the writer had developed a critique of Cartesianism that was only intimated in the earlier work. The "Relation" introduces motifs of contestation that begin to delineate a feminist

77. Recueil Bouhours, 49–52. The original French of La Vigne's madrigal and Dupré's reply is as follows:

A Iris
En lui envoiant ces vers.
Madrigal

Que votre austerité m'excuse
Si j'ose à l'Inconnu parler si tendrement.
Entre nous ce n'est qu'une ruse,
Pour le tirer plutot de son deguisement.
Ma promesse est un peu hardie;
Mais à la faire, Iris, je ne cours nul hazard.
Je lui dirai, s'il vient, je me suis repentie,
Et vous venez trop tard.

Reponse d'Iris
A Climene.

Usez de quelqu'autre finesse.
La grandeur de votre promesse
Fait que je n'en croirai personne sur sa foi.
Pour gagner cette récompense,
Est-il un honnête homme en France,
Qui ne vous dise pas, c'est moi?

alternative. It questions the uses of Cartesian rationalism and hints that mechanistic laws are responsible for the "death of nature."

Whereas the *relations* of Descartes's death by writers such as Claude Clerselier, Philibert de la Mare, and Adrien Baillet are confined to a supposedly factual narrative, his niece meditates in a mixture of prose and verse on the meaning of the philosopher's system.[78] Why did she wait forty years to write her account? She says that she was motivated by a Huguenot minister who had been in Stockholm at the time of Descartes's death and was now on his way out of France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Perhaps in this critical moment of the Counter-Reformation, Catherine Descartes wanted to transmit to posterity her image of her uncle's pious death. Whatever the reason, the time intervening between her "Ombre de Descartes" and the "Relation" gave her more distance on the philosopher.[79] The "Relation" no longer portrays Descartes as the bearer of a universal truth, but rather as a mere mortal who himself must yield to a higher truth. In one sense, the writer was only respecting the conventions of the *relation*, for it is after all granted to the dying to glimpse truths of a higher order. Nevertheless, she used convention as a convenient framework for questioning her uncle's achievements.

This *relation* gives us a retrospective view of the philosopher's life as destiny. Queen Christina of Sweden has a vision in which she decides to send for Descartes to help her resolve her difficulties with the problem of attraction. Her summons is a fateful call: "To instruct a queen he hastens; / Thinking he goes forth to glory he rushes to his death."[80] All that remains of his dualism in death is the soul's transcendence of the body. The philosophical conflicts in which Descartes has been embroiled are dissolved by divine truth: "Whoever sees truth, sees also / The multitudes divided by conflicting errors" (138).

In a gender role reversal that ironizes the convention of the *relation*, Catherine Descartes seriously challenges the masculinity of her uncle's philosophical discourse. Her prose version of Descartes's death agrees with other accounts that attribute it to a pulmonary inflammation resulting from his exposure to the harsh Swedish winter. But she also offers a poetic account, which subverts the prose by having

78. For the other *relations*, see AT 3:481–94.

79. Leonora Cohen Rosenfield views the "Relation" as Gassendist. See her *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine: Animal Soul in French Letters from Descartes to La Mettrie*, rev. ed. (New York: Octagon, 1968), 113, 158–59.

80. Catherine Descartes, "Relation de la mort de M. Descartes, Le Philosophe," in Recueil Bouhours, 129–39, esp. 131.

Nature punish the philosopher for having invaded her privacy. His lessons to Christina are an instance of his insistent prying into Nature's secrets: "It is said that then astonished Nature / Was indignant at finding herself discovered. / Rash mortal, audacious soul, / Learn that one does not view the Gods with impunity." Nature revealed to Descartes is compared to Diana discovered at her bath by Actaeon: "[Like Diana] seeing herself open to René's view, / Nature was angered and swore his destruction" (131–32). In becoming an agent, this avenging Nature loses her passive pose as receptacle of the male creative principle and object of scientific investigation. It is as if the poet deliberately confounds her uncle's desire for philosophers to become "masters and possessors of Nature."[81]

Descartes's own neostoical lessons return to haunt him with bitter irony. It is no longer the active soul or mind that prevails over the passions, but an active Nature that presides over human destiny. The writer has Descartes's good friend Pierre Chanut, France's ambassador to Sweden at the time of Descartes's death, tell the philosopher to forget his physical pain and to entrust his body to Mother Nature:

> It is a tribute that we owe her:
> Let us pay it freely, and follow without a murmur
> The command of Nature.
> She is good, she is wise, and her rich presents
> Like those of a good mother
> Showered on all, are long savored
> And her great woes soon pass. (133)

In the poetic revision of Descartes's life and death, feminine principles rule. It is Lady Philosophy who appears to Queen Christina in her vision, urging the monarch to seek "illustrious René." This Philosophy, a "modest woman," is not, however, the lofty allegorization of male writers but an ominous figure, with a "gaunt face."[82] She eventually gives way to Nature, conveying the poet's hint that Descartes needed to reorder his priorities. In a final dialogue between Chanut and Descartes, the ambassador pictures his friend leaving life "like a great conqueror" whose name will resound through the uni-

81. AT 6:62. Cf. Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 188.

82. Recueil Bouhours, 131. For a recent discussion of the iconography of feminine allegorical figures, in this case those relating to early modern science, see Londa Schiebinger, "Feminine Icons: The Face of Early Modern Science," *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Summer 1988): 661–91.

verse. To Chanut's expression of grief over the approaching loss of his friend, Descartes replies that they will be reunited in heaven, where the chastened philosopher will leave the investigation of Nature forever behind. He will "never more cast his eyes on Nature" (137–38).

We don't know the reasons behind Catherine Descartes's reevaluation of her uncle's accomplishments in her later work. She eventually rejected the theory of sensation that he outlined in the *Principles of Philosophy* (1644).[83] Perhaps her own advanced age and approaching death modified her views. But there may be more continuity between the "Ombre" and the "Relation" than my discussion suggests. In both works a previously subordinate feminine takes a leading role—first as a teacher (Anne de la Vigne), then as a guiding principle of life (Nature). In the later work, the poet seems to revise Descartes's *Passions de l'âme*, adopting its neostoical moral philosophy and ignoring its mechanistic dualism. This strategy allows her to divinize nature. For if in the Cartesian system soulless res extensa defines nature precisely as that which is *not* spiritual, Catherine Descartes rehabilitates Nature by reinfusing her with soul and with moral value.[84]

Her *relation* of Descartes's death is therefore also an account of a figurative death. It kills Descartes's discourse by feminizing it. Lady Philosophy, handmaiden to a masculinized science that subjects Nature to its laws, bows to a Nature reconstructed as Mother. The Descartes whom we see breathing his pious last may be a monument to a great man, but he is also a warning against the pride of intellect and rationality.

Chameleons of a Different Color

Distrust of Cartesian mechanism was prevalent in the de Scudéry circle. Madeleine de Scudéry's opposition to Descartes's beast-machine theory has been explained by her well-documented love of animals.[85] I see her antimechanistic stance as part of a discursive set that jarred with the Cartesian world view. In this connection it is of

83. See Madame de Sévigné's letter of 30 June 1677 to Madame de Grignan in Madame de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, 2:479 and 2:1325–26, n. 4; also her letter of 15 May 1689 to Madame de Grignan, 3:600.

84. On Descartes's soulless definition of nature, see Bordo, *Flight to Objectivity*, 102.

85. See Nicole Aronson, *Mademoiselle de Scudéry* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 122–23. Cf. Rosenfield, *Beast-Machine*, 160–62, who thinks that de Scudéry observed will and reason in animals.

great interest that Catherine Descartes, Anne de la Vigne, and Marie Dupré were among "Sapho's" friends. Catherine Descartes certainly shared de Scudéry's hostility to animal mechanism, as her verses on a much-fêted warbler in her hostess's garden make clear:

> Here is my compliment
> To the loveliest warbler,
> When it returns to you.
> Ah! I then exclaimed in surprise:
> With all due respect to my uncle, it has judgment.[86]

A feminist alternative to Descartes's rationalism—specifically, his mechanism and his objectivity—underlies de Scudéry's description of an important philosophical episode in the history of her salon. On 1 June 1672, the consul of Alexandria sent de Scudéry a gift of two chameleons. They reached her at the end of September, and for the short time that they survived they were the subjects of much experimentation, discussion, and creative effort in her home.[87] The account of this episode, which appears in her *Nouvelles Conversations de morale* (1688), includes a collection of poems on the two animals by various members of the group, among them Anne de la Vigne (who delivered the funeral oration on the death of one of the chameleons). To my knowledge there is no concrete evidence that Catherine Descartes and Marie Dupré were present for these activities, but there is no known reason why they could not have been there. Frédéric Lachèvre attributes one of the poems in de Scudéry's collection to Catherine Descartes, but he appears to have been mistaken.[88] In any event, the three friends' views were consistent with those prevalent in de Scud-

86. As quoted in Titon du Tillet, *Le Parnasse français*, 1:505. Cf. Rosenfield, *Beast-Machine*, 159–60. Rosenfield does not attempt to explain the de Scudéry circle's rejection of animal mechanism other than by the sentimentality of women about animals (159). She adds that "the fair sex was prone to reject animal mechanism" (201).

87. See Niderst, *Madeleine de Scudéry*, 499–500.

88. Frédéric Lachèvre, *Bibliographie des recueils collectifs de poésies publiés de 1597 à 1700*, 4 vols. (Paris: H. Leclerc, 1901–5), 3:293–94. Lachèvre cites the first line of a poem by Catherine Descartes that appeared elsewhere and that appears nowhere in de Scudéry's collection. All but two of the poems in the 1688 edition of de Scudéry's *Nouvelles Conversations* are signed. One of these two was supposedly written by a man who wished to remain anonymous. It is of course possible that Catherine Descartes was the author. The other poem is said to have been by "the same hand as that of the person who did the funeral." Was this another poem by Anne de la Vigne, in addition to the signed one? See [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Nouvelles Conversations de morale* (The Hague: Jacob van Ellinkhuysen, 1688), 607–19.

éry's circle. The narrative of the chameleons typifies the blending of metaphor and the new science that characterizes the construction of the feminist alternative.

De Scudéry's *conversation*, the "Histoire de deux caméléons" (Story of Two Chameleons), is presented as an actual alternative to Claude Perrault's *Description anatomique d'un caméléon* (Anatomical Description of a Chameleon) (1669), published under the auspices of the newly founded Académie des Sciences. The little treatise was later incorporated into the academicians' major production on animal anatomy, the magnificent two-volume folio edition of the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire naturelle des animaux* (Papers for a Natural History of Animals) (1671–76).[89] Part of a general campaign to glorify the monarchy, the Academy's grandly illustrated volumes were meant to display the scientific achievements of the crown and so in a sense they popularized natural history.

"L'Histoire de deux caméléons" opens with an allusion by the narrator, Bérénice, to the *Description anatomique* of 1669, which remains unnamed throughout: "a very lovely, ample Treatise, which is in everyone's possession." Bérénice proposes a different account of the chameleon: "I won't step in to speak as a Physician or a Philosopher; I don't have the ability. I will simply relate what I very carefully and precisely observed."[90] Even in this brief statement of purpose, the complex intertextual relation between the official academic description and de Scudéry's unofficial *conversation* is apparent. Although the feminine narrator claims no special expertise or training in the natural sciences, she betrays a concern to conform to the academicians' standard of objective observation. On the other hand, the academic discourse had not yet become completely disengaged from the older discourse of metaphor and analogy to which the de Scudéry circle remained attached. De Scudéry and the author of the *Description anatomique* were friends. The salonnière made a gift of her two dead chameleons to Perrault and his fellow academician Jean Pecquet for dissection. A later edition of the Academy's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire naturelle des animaux* thanks "the illustrious Mademoiselle de Scudéry" for her generosity in this regard.[91] Power and privilege,

89. On the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire naturelle des animaux*, see my *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 261–78.

90. [Madeleine de Scudéry], *Nouvelles Conversations de morale*, 2d ed. (The Hague: Jacob van Ellinkhuysen, 1692), 296. All further references will be to this edition.

91. *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, depuis 1666, jusqu'à 1699*, 3 vols. (Paris: La Compagnie des Libraires, 1733), 1:37. For the vexed publishing history of the

however, separated the Académie des Sciences from the salon. This gulf was even wider than that which separated women from the Académie Française. Neither academy admitted women. But de Scudéry, who was distinguished by the older academy, won no official recognition from the Académie des Sciences apart from its perfunctory acknowledgment of her gift. This academy's links to Colbert's program of mercantilist expansion helped to define a new arena of economic power from which French women were definitively banned.[92] Claude Perrault's Cartesianism was questionable, but he spoke what was to become the dominant discourse of a rationality that Descartes was instrumental in establishing.[93] De Scudéry and her three women friends did not shrink from an understanding of the new rationality, but, excluded as they were from official participation, their enthusiasm was qualified.

Perrault's effort was to observe and to describe. To this end he attempts in his *Description anatomique* to divest the observer of any prejudices or sentiments that could interfere with an exact transcription of truth. In his introductory remarks he discards as false much of what had been written on the chameleon and gives us to understand that in substituting the truth of observation for conjecture and myth

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Mémoires pour servir á l'histoire naturelle des animaux, which is included in this set of the Académie's *Mémoires,* see F[rancis] J[oseph] Cole, *A History of Comparative Anatomy from Aristotle to the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Dover, 1975), 397–400. The title of the chapter on the chameleon in this edition has been changed to "Description anatomique de trois caméléons" (35–68). Somewhere between 1671 (when the treatise of 1669 made its appearance in the original edition of the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire naturelle des animaux*) and 1733, when another edition of the *Mémoires* appeared, observations on de Scudéry's chameleons were inserted as additions to the earlier narrative. The result is much confusion. The "three chameleons" are the two given by de Scudéry plus one that evidently belonged to the anatomists. But "our chameleon" in this hodge-podge version of 1733 refers both to the animal of 1669 and the one used sometime later. The original chameleon of the anatomists was from Egypt, and it may have prompted de Scudéry's desire to have one for herself from that country. Perrault tells us in the *Description anatomique* of 1669 that the Egyptian variety was twice as long as the Arabian or Mexican kind (5). Geoffrey Vincent Sutton, unaware both of de Scudéry's narrative and of the chronology I've just outlined, incorrectly states that de Scudéry's chameleons inspired the *Description anatomique,* a treatise that was written before the salonnière received her own animals, on which she and her friends conducted their informal observations. Geoffrey Vincent Sutton, "A Science for a Polite Society: Cartesian Natural Philosophy in Paris during the Reigns of Louis XIII and XIV" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1982), 395.

92. On the relation of the Académie des Sciences to Colbert's mercantilism, see my *Ideology and Culture,* 222–309.

93. Geoffrey Vincent Sutton convincingly argues that Perrault's *Essais de physique, ou recueil de plusieurs traités touchant les choses naturelles* (1680) were Cartesian in inspiration. See Sutton, *Science,* 330–51, 364–78.

he writes against the ancients. De Scudéry also claims to report from direct observation. At the same time, she writes empathically of her animals' feelings, registering vividly, for instance, the male chameleon's grief over his female companion's death.[94] Perrault treats the chameleon dispassionately as an object of investigation. Although he too rejects Descartes's beast-machine theory, he is interested only in the explanatory value of animal feelings. He hypothesizes, for example, that cautiousness and not fear, as had been thought, is responsible for the chameleon's measured gait.[95]

Perrault, like Descartes, sought a transparent signifier. He aimed to avoid metaphor and other forms of rhetorical ornamentation. It is as a comparative anatomist that he likens the chameleon's head, structure by structure, to that of a fish.[96] De Scudéry's corresponding comparison, by contrast, is metaphorical. Instead of a structural homology, the fish is an image, to which she adds that of an "antique helmet."[97] Perrault did not of course entirely desert metaphor for "plain-speaking." It is from Perrault that de Scudéry borrows the image of the chameleon's tongue as an elephant's tusk.[98] Yet although the two writers describe the living chameleon's eye similarly, there is nothing in Perrault's description of the dissected animal's eye to match the magic that de Scudéry finds in it: "The whole body of the eye appeared like a pearl, perfect in its roundness, whiteness and sheen; the lively little black pupil surrounded by a tiny circle of the most beautiful gold in the world and this golden circle bordered by another tiny circle of pink."[99] Perrault largely confines his description to the eye's anatomy.[100]

In general, the observations that resulted from the informal experimentation with the two chameleons in Sapho's salon agree with those of the academicians (Perrault took part in the proceedings at her home). Both groups, for example, reached no conclusion as to the reasons for the animal's change of color but refuted the notion that the chameleon takes on the color of surrounding objects. There were

94. De Scudéry, *Nouvelles Conversations*, 305–6.

95. [Claude Perrault], *Description anatomique d'un caméléon, d'un castor, d'un dromadaire, d'un ours, et d'une gazelle* (Paris: Frédéric Léonard, 1669), 20–21.

96. Ibid., 12.

97. De Scudéry, *Nouvelles Conversations*, 297–98.

98. Ibid., 301. Cf. Perrault, *Description anatomique*, 32.

99. De Scudéry, *Nouvelles Conversations*, 315. For the descriptions of the living chameleon's eye, see de Scudéry, 299–300, and Perrault, *Description anatomique*, 15.

100. Perrault, *Description anatomique*, 28–29.

two major areas of disagreement. Perrault reported no evidence of any organ of hearing or sound in the chameleon. De Scudéry agreed that the animal was voiceless but insisted that her male chameleon responded to his given name of "Méléon." We sense that just as Perrault was writing against the ancients, de Scudéry was writing against him: "I can guarantee that those who have said that chameleons don't hear are mistaken."[101]

The second and major point of disagreement was that of the chameleon's nourishment. Perrault reports that the animal ate flies and dismisses as a fable of the ancients the idea that it lived on air. The academicians observed that the function of the animal's distinctive tongue was to trap insects. When they dissected their chameleon, they found flies and worms in its intestines and inside its excrement. De Scudéry, on the other hand, goes to great pains to prove that the chameleon lives on air alone. She asserts that her female chameleon refused all offers of worms and insects and that its darting tongue took in no insects. In an apparent refutation of Perrault, she describes the chameleon's excrement superficially and reports that her observations "don't disprove that air is the chameleon's natural food. However it may be, I conclude nothing. I relate only what I've observed." (She doesn't mention that only when the academicians dissolved the pebble-like excrement in vinegar were the flies inside it visible.)[102]

Why did de Scudéry decide to contradict evidence that seems to us irrefutable, using, moreover, the "objective" language of the academicians? De Scudéry was intensely interested in the scientific experimentation that she followed from outside academic walls. Yet for her, animals fully retained their metaphorical and moral value. Her treatment of the chameleons illustrates both her attachment to the language of metaphor, an attachment that entailed rejection of Cartesian mechanism, and her curiosity about a scientific practice from which she was excluded. At the end of the *conversation* "Des Loüanges" (On Praise), which precedes the "Histoire de deux caméléons," chameleons make their appearance as an image of that pride which "feeds only on air."[103] Although the chameleon does not have the same metaphorical meaning in the *conversation* to follow, de Scudéry needed to "prove" that it lived on air in order to make her point.

101. De Scudéry, *Nouvelles Conversations*, 306–7. Cf. ibid., 30.

102. Perrault, *Description anatomique*, 33–35, and de Scudéry, *Nouvelles Conversations*, 301, 312–11 (misnumbered in this edition).

103. De Scudéry, *Nouvelles Conversations*, 293.

Because she observed that the living animal became puffed up,[104] her image seemed justified.

In the *conversation* on the chameleons, the animal that lives on air becomes an image of the spirituality that Cartesian mechanism denied it. At the outset of the *conversation*, de Scudéry announces her anti-Cartesian position: "It's easy to observe that [the chameleon] sees with intelligence and with judgment, whether it walks, climbs a tree, or chooses a resting place."[105] Louis Le Laboureur's sonnet, like the other poetry included in the *conversation*, is a homage to "Sapho" that turns on a spiritualization of the chameleon. In the second quatrain the poet brushes aside accusations of the chameleon's notorious inconstancy and offers a counterimage that ends in a conceit of praise for Sapho:

> Our body [of the chameleon] is almost nothing but spirit,
> A bit of sun nourishes it,
> It animates us, it inspires us;
> And we come to live with you,
> Because the air that you breathe here,
> Is the purest of all.[106]

The metaphorical correspondence between the human Sapho and the animal bears a moral truth: the spirit that infuses life, human and animal alike, carries a spark of divinity. Like Catherine Descartes in the *relation* of her uncle's death, the poets in this collection glorify a vitalist, divinized nature. The relation between the human and the animal is not that of thinking subject to soulless object, as in Cartesian mechanism, but an empathic one between creatures of nature.

In Anne de la Vigne's contribution, "Les Caméléons à M.D.S.," it is de Scudéry's chameleon-like genius that embodies the connection between the animal and the human. Sapho's novels present continually changing color in their "lively pictures" and "variety of noble sentiments." The novelist's "divine genius" takes on a different guise in each of her various subjects: "Philosopher, *galant*, warrior, statesman, / Into anything [her genius] wants it can be transformed, / And uniformly elevated, brilliant, tender, heroic, / It always instructs, it always charms."[107]

104. Ibid., 309–10.
105. Ibid., 300.
106. Ibid., 365.
107. Ibid., 368.

De Scudéry did, as she claimed, report what she saw. She and her friends were keenly interested in natural philosophy. They were sufficiently impressed by the discourse of objective observation and experimentation to adapt it to their purposes. But they *saw* differently from the academicians.[108] The metaphors they choose as vehicles for their empathic connection to animals underscore the moral value that the chameleons held for them. De Scudéry didn't "see" the flies in the dissected chameleon's body because for her the higher truth was moral. From her perspective, natural philosophy was subordinated to moral philosophy. Perrault, on the other hand, was less interested in moral lessons than he was in facts entirely separable from them. "For in order to teach that flatterers lack candor and that vain, ambitious spirits feed on nothing, it doesn't have to be true that the chameleon turns all colors but white and that it lives only on air." If you want to moralize the chameleon, he goes on to say, at least get your facts straight.[109] His discourse puts natural philosophy first.

The juxtaposition of de Scudéry's *conversation* on the chameleons with Perrault's *Description anatomique* reveals that learned women of mid-seventeenth-century France could participate in the construction of rational discourse, but from afar. From the other side of the academic door they had a distinctive contribution to make: the conciliation of an older metaphorical and analogical language with the new rationality. We cannot now, to be sure, take as serious science de Scudéry's description of her chameleons. But her refusal to bracket moral considerations along with her own subjectivity in her investigation of nature points to the possibility of a science that incorporates the ethical demands of the thinking subject.

If the feminist alternative was a contestation of Cartesian objectivity, how did de Scudéry's three friends come to be known as Cartesian? The women did not completely reject Descartes's philosophy. As the academicians did not leave metaphor and analogy totally behind them, so the salon embraced Cartesian thought selectively. The "precious" transcendence of the body and the refusal of love, which characterize the writings we have examined, can be seen as consistent

108. There is one paragraph in the 1733 edition of the Academy's *Mémoires* which evokes the atmosphere of de Scudéry's circle and which may reflect Perrault's participation in its activities: "When one of the little Chameleons died, the other appeared to be so horrified that he climbed to the top of the cage where he had been with his companion and stayed as far from the dead body as possible." *Mémoires* (1733), 1:48.

109. Perrault, *Description anatomique*, 36–37.

with Descartes's dualism and his theory of the passions. The feminist alternative, however, dismantles the barrier that denies an empathic connection between thinking subject and object. Why, after all, would Cartesian objectivity have appealed to the learned women of early modern times? If they were eager to shed their physical impediments, it was because the female body relegated them to the status of object. Their struggle was precisely to gain recognition as thinking subjects.

How possible was it to be a Cartesian and a woman? It is true that men who thought of themselves as Cartesians did not necessarily subscribe to animal mechanism or to other key features of Descartes's philosophy.[110] *Cartésienne* however, emerges as a contradictory term. These women were at odds with the objectivity that lay at the very heart of Cartesian discourse. In this and subsequent generations of cartésiennes, the contradiction persisted. But with the passing of the Cartesian moment and the consolidation of rational discourse, the dissonance became more and more muted.

Enlightened Views

Claire-Marie de Saint-Chamond

Three-quarters of a century after the informal debates on the chameleons, Cartesian philosophy was no longer the subject of such intense disagreement. After its triumphant phase, Cartesianism had finally ceded the philosophical ground to Newton.[111] In 1765 the Académie Française proposed as the subject of its competition in eloquence a belated eulogy of Descartes. One of the contestants was Claire-Marie de Saint-Chamond, marquise de Vieuville (b. 1731). In her enthusiastic praise of Descartes, Saint-Chamond could be considered the truest of the cartésiennes we have examined so far. But in our terms she was just marginally a Cartesian woman. The elements of doubt, exploration, and contestation that characterized the work of her seventeenth-century predecessors are barely perceptible in her eulogy. She and her male competitors speak the same triumphant

110. There is a considerable body of literature on this point. For a good summary, see Ira O. Wade, *The Intellectual Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 265–66.

111. For a succinct summary of the historical process by which chinks in the Cartesian armor caused it to fall apart even as it dominated the intellectual scene, see J. H. Brumfitt, *The French Enlightenment* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 27–43.

discourse, whose terms were set by men. Yet although by this time the feminist alternative was largely a thing of the past, faint echoes of it can still be heard in Saint-Chamond's eulogy. Of the three submissions to the competition sponsored by the Académie Française which I will discuss here, hers was the least critical of Descartes. It is the only one, however, to expose the issue of gender. In Saint-Chamond, a gendered critique survives not as a feminist alternative to Cartesian rationalism but as a sign of discontent with a discourse that has made no room for her.

Saint-Chamond didn't win the prize. In fact, the printed version of her discourse includes a notice to the effect that the judges received it too late for consideration. The prize was shared by Gabriel-Henri Gaillard (1726–1806) of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres and Antoine-Léonard Thomas (1732–85), better known for his essay on women, *Essai sur le caractère, les moeurs et l'esprit des Femmes, dans les différents siècles* (Essay on the Character, Manners, and Mind of Women through the Centuries) (1772). This victory marked the fifth in succession for Thomas, who had survived accusations that he had plagiarized the work of the economist Véron de Forbonnais in his *Eloge de Sully* (Eulogy of Sully) (1763). Fréron's *Année Littéraire* had gone so far as to express a preference for Saint-Chamond's entry (under her maiden name of Mazarelli), for she had been a competitor in the contest of 1763 also.[112] In 1767 Thomas was honored with election to the Académie Française. Gaillard publicly acknowledged the superiority of his rival's entry for the Descartes competition. He attributed the judges' decision to award a joint prize to a need to cater to both the philosophical and the antiphilosophical parties in the Academy (Thomas represented the philosophes).[113] Another of the competitors was Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814), renowned especially for his *Tableau de Paris* (1781). He became a member of the Institut de France, an umbrella institution for the academies of the Old Regime which was founded during the Revolution. I will be reading Saint-Chamond's eulogy against those written by Thomas and Mercier.

Fréron had nothing but praise for Saint-Chamond's eulogy. He was impressed by her erudition, her knowledge of Cartesianism, her in-

112. Etienne Micard, *Un Ecrivain académique au XVIIIe siècle: Antoine-Léonard Thomas, (1732–1785)* (Paris: Edouard Champion, 1924), 143–46.

113. [Antoine-Léonard] Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Saint-Surin, 6 vols. (Paris: Verdière, 1825), 1:xlii-xliv. Further references to this edition will appear in parentheses in the text.

telligence, and her style. No friend of the philosophes, Fréron saw in Saint-Chamond a philosophical spirit of another sort. Her eulogy, he said, was a "work worthy of a Philosophe of the first order, I mean a Philosophe of the good, sound variety."[114] Fréron, like the reviewer for Grimm's *Correspondance Littéraire,* scorned Gaillard's work as pompous and inept. Grimm's reviewer was somewhat more charitable to Thomas than was Fréron. The reviewer, who doesn't mention Saint-Chamond's piece on Descartes, calls the judges' decision to have Gaillard share the award "incomprehensible." If the Academy had decided to award the 1763 prize for the discourse on Sully jointly to "Mademoiselle Mazarelli" and Thomas, he asserts, "it wouldn't have done such an unjust and absurd thing as it has in associating [Thomas] with Gaillard this time." Both journals criticized Thomas for exaggerating Descartes's influence and importance. The notice in Grimm's journal was predominantly favorable, however, whereas it was only after a string of biting criticisms that Fréron grudgingly acknowledged Thomas's worthiness.[115]

In a youthful portrait of herself, Saint-Chamond said that she was "foolish with the fools, learned with the scholars; for it's correct to say that I know a little about everything; few Bourgeoises have had as much education as I."[116] Judging from her writings, she was if anything overly modest in her self-portrait. Her *Eloge de René Descartes* abounds with evidence of her erudition in natural and moral philosophy from antiquity to modern times. Among her writings are a defense of Rousseau,[117] a novel, *Camédris* (1765), published under the name of Mazarelli, and a comedy, *Les Amants sans le savoir* (The Unwitting Lovers) (1771). Fréron had high praise for both her novel and her defense of Rousseau.[118]

Of Saint-Chamond's personal life we have only the barest outline. Her father was Italian, her mother a Parisian. Apparently there was little money for a suitable dowry. Whether or not her long rela-

114. Fréron, *L'Année Littéraire* (1766), 4:206–7.

115. For Fréron's notices on Thomas and Gaillard respectively, see *L'Année Littéraire* (1766), 1:10–45 and 3:145–54. For Grimm's notice of Thomas and Gaillard, see the *Correspondance Littéraire* (September 1765): 543–50. For the remark on Saint-Chamond (Mademoiselle Mazarelli), see 544.

116. [Joseph de La Porte, with J. F. de La Croix], *Histoire littéraire des femmes françoises,* 5 vols. (Paris: Lacombe, 1769), 5:478.

117. *Jean-Jacques à Mr S. . . . Sur des réflexions contre ses derniers écrits. Lettre pseudonyme* (Geneva, 1784). The letter was first published in the *Année Littéraire* of 1763.

118. On the *Lettre de Mlle M. à M. Jean-Jacques Rousseau,* see *L'Année Littéraire* (1763), 6:19. *Camédris* is noticed in 1765, 2:145–64.

tionship to a "man of quality," possibly eventuating in pregnancy, was "regularized" by engagement or marriage is a subject of some dispute. His death in 1750 precipitated her into a scandalous three-year legal battle in which her detractors hurled accusations of sexual misconduct at her. At the close of the trial she married the marquis de Saint-Chamond. This time she seems to have been lucky in love, for her husband probably encouraged her creative efforts. Contemporaries reported that she wrote in order to please him.[119]

Saint-Chamond's representation of Descartes differed little from that of her competitors in the Academy's contest. Enlightenment discourse, transforming Descartes the philosopher into a philosophe, assigned him a place of honor in a hall of famous "men of genius" who furthered the march of human progress. In this scheme, Descartes appears like a beacon to illuminate the darkness of prejudice and superstition. Clinging above all to his liberty and independence, he travels throughout Europe in pursuit of a truth that transcends local customs and morals. His is a universal mind that embraces all human concerns, from morality and politics to natural philosophy. He is a persecuted and misunderstood intellectual hero, stalwart in his solitude. A favorite image in this sentimentalized construction is that of Descartes in splendid isolation atop the snow-covered Alps, contemplating God's creation. All three authors in this competition were eager to exonerate the philosopher of the charge of atheism. None of them was bothered by the theological questions that gave pause to Elisabeth.

The competition was in effect an invitation to portray Descartes as a national hero. For Saint-Chamond, his was an intellectual navigator's voyage of discovery.[120] Thomas likens him both to a navigator and to one of "those dethroned kings, who, on the ruins of their empire, seem born to command men" (3:252–53). Mercier's imagery of conquest features Descartes as a latter-day Alexander, the discoverer of a new world.[121]

Beginning in 1750, opportunities for such glorification were opened up by changes in official academic policy regarding the subjects of the competitions in poetry and eloquence. Until that time, the topics had

119. For a somewhat murky account of Saint-Chamond's life, see La Porte, 5:473–80.

120. [Claire-Marie de Saint-Chamond], *Eloge de René Descartes* (Paris: Chez la veuve Duchesne, 1765), 8–9. Further references in parentheses in the text.

121. [Louis-Sébastien Mercier], *Eloge de René Descartes*, in *Eloges et discours philosophiques qui ont concouru pour les prix de l'Académie Françoise et de plusieurs autres académies* (Amsterdam: E. van Harrevelt, 1776), 179, 199, 181n.

been limited to theology, morality, and praise of the king. When Madeleine de Scudéry won the first competition in eloquence in 1671, the subject was "That Glory and Praise belong to God as his Exclusive Right."[122] All entries had to conform to certain standards of piety, set by Guez de Balzac, the founder of the prize. Each entry needed to secure the approval of the Faculty of Theology and was required to end with a short prayer to Jesus Christ.[123] In 1669 the founding of the prize in poetry was the occasion for specifying that "the main goal of the Academy is to dedicate the incomparable Louis's name to immortality." In 1750 a moral epistle was substituted for praise of the king. Finally, in 1759, after the system of two separate prizes was replaced by one single prize alternating between poetry and eloquence, the secretary of the Academy proposed as a theme the praise of famous French men. In secularizing and widening the scope of praiseworthy heroic enterprise, the Academy revealed its philosophic sympathies.[124] In 1765 Descartes became the first philosopher to be included in the new category. Previous subjects had been restricted to statesmen and military leaders.

The Academy, then, gave its tacit seal of approval to the philosophes in elevating one among their numbers to a superhuman status formerly reserved for God or the king. From this perspective, it mattered little whether Descartes was right or wrong. The century intervening between Descartes's death and his admission to academic immortality became the salient fact, for it allowed the assimilation of the philosophe to the man of genius. The eulogy of Descartes became a means to the philosophes's self-justification.[125] The antiphilosophe Fréron understood the tactic well. In his review, he chided Thomas for his portrait of Descartes as a martyr to truth. Writers of his day, he said, were "crazy with their persecutions." According to Fréron, they thought persecution was a mark of genius and were only too eager to garner a little of it for themselves.[126]

As if in accordance with Fréron's caricature, both Thomas and Mercier take the same tack: even if Descartes was wrong, he was sublime in his errors. Mercier, more extreme than Thomas, immediately warns his readers that Descartes was the architect of an "immense

122. [Antoine-Léonard] Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: A. Belin, 1819), 1:iv.

123. See [Edmé Jacques Benoît] Rathery and Boutron, *Mademoiselle de Scudéry, sa vie et sa correspondance* (Paris: Léon Techener, 1873), 120.

124. Micard, *Ecrivain*, 119–22.

125. Cf. ibid., 147–48.

126. *L'Année Littéraire* (1766), 1:40.

but insubstantial edifice: the materials are solid, but the plans are chimerical; it's an amazing and illusory world" (171). He adds: "Sublime in his very moments of error, Descartes gave to astonished mankind a bold, new, plausible System" (197). Both Mercier and Thomas are unequivocal about the Descartes-Newton controversy: Newton wins hands down. Mercier thinks that Newton's system "destroyed" Descartes's, although Descartes blazed the trail for him (199–201). Descartes's great advantage was that "you entered his school . . . without study." In order to understand Newton, "you need an initiation into the most abstruse geometry" (200). Thomas genuinely, although not uncritically, admired Cartesian mechanism, but he rejected Descartes's innate ideas, metaphysics, and deductive system in favor of Newtonian induction (376–77). Descartes was "sublime even in his mistakes, methodical in his misconceptions, useful in his errors." (313).

Thomas and Mercier amply fulfulled the Academy's intention to rehabilitate the philosopher who in the 1760s was widely perceived as outmoded.[127] The Newtonian Voltaire complimented Thomas on his success in the enterprise: "No one reads Descartes anymore; but they will read his eulogy, which is yours at the same time."[128] To have championed Descartes outright would have seemed retrograde. To praise him discreetly for his accomplishment, to pigeonhole him neatly in the scholarly hall of fame, to acknowledge both Newton's victory and his debt to his French predecessor were all that was required. Although Mercier was no match for Thomas in rhetorical skill and erudition, both men had an equally good understanding of the general strategy.

Saint-Chamond took the task more literally. She brought up the rear guard in her defense of Descartes against Newton: "No one before [Descartes] had gone so far in the pursuit of truth; and he who since then has combatted him has not yet surpassed him."[129] The only point on which she takes serious issue with Descartes is his placement of the soul in the pineal gland. "Since Descartes recognized the soul as cause and judge of our sensations, he should have located it in those farthest reaches of our bodies where its creative fire infuses desire, joy, disgust, sadness, warmth, and life." "The naturalist misled the philosopher," she said (18–19). Saint-Chamond

127. See Micard, *Ecrivain*, 146–47.

128. From Voltaire's letter to Thomas on his eulogy, in Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Saint-Surin, 3:402–3.

129. Saint-Chamond, *Eloge*, 36; see also 71–72.

seems not to have noticed that her vitalist revision of Descartes's theory of the passions has serious implications for his mechanism, which she summarizes without critical comment: "The sky, the earth, our bodies and those of animals are natural machines whose springs and other causes the skillful Machinist tries to discover" (24). In a note, she hazards a criticism of his neostoicism which pales in comparison with Elisabeth's robust challenge. There are some passions, such as friendship, compassion, and generosity, which are so constructive and useful, she argues, that they should not be dominated (70–71, n. 13).

Because for Saint-Chamond, as for the seventeenth-century cartésiennes, it is moral philosophy that crowns all philosophical endeavor, she focuses her objections on the *Passions de l'âme*. All three contestants follow the generic guidelines of the set piece in discussing Descartes's natural philosophy, his moral philosophy, and his life. All three suggest that perhaps Descartes's most important legacy for the Enlightenment was his method. Any philosophe would have agreed that the highest aim of philosophy is human happiness and the betterment of our lot on earth. Saint-Chamond's presentation, however, is weighted toward Descartes's contributions as a moralist. "Moral philosophy, which was always his first goal, is pure, simple, worthy of a true Philosopher, that is, of a man who joins all branches of learning to all the virtues" (9). Saint-Chamond in fact explicitly vaunts the superiority of moral philosophy over mathematical reasoning. Descartes advised adopting the probable solution when truth was unavailable, she says. "This maxim drew him closer to humanity, whereas an overly geometrical Philosophy would have removed him from it. Happiness cannot be calculated" (12).

Thomas, on the other hand, implies that it is precisely geometric calculation which will bring human happiness. His Descartes, the standard one of the philosophes, is a system-builder. The problem with systems, Thomas points out, is that the ultimate questions they ask are unanswerable. Better to be more modest in our goals and to stick to less difficult questions. Newton's universe has the virtue of being calculable: "Geometry, which is the greatest instrument used in physics today, can be applied only to simple objects. So Newton, great as he was, was obliged to simplify the universe in order to calculate it. . . . We must agree that [Newton's] universe is much easier to calculate than Descartes's, where every action is based on a mechanism" (3:290).

Saint-Chamond's Descartes would have pleased de Scudéry and her circle. Her eulogy opens with a declaration to the effect that philosophy's mission is to teach wisdom and happiness and to "raise us to the heights of the Supreme Being" (1). When Descartes makes his first appearance it is as a bearer of light who, "inflamed with a love of truth sought man in man himself. Working ceaselessly to make him happy, he gave laws to the mind, a bridle to the passions, virtues to the soul" (3). Thomas and Mercier, by contrast, both choose to open with the theme of the misunderstood "man of genius." The phrase recurs with monotonous regularity throughout their discourses.

Saint-Chamond undoubtedly identified less with the "man of genius" than did either Thomas or Mercier. Instead of expressing solidarity with the misunderstood genius, she indicates her distance from him, her inadequacy to the task of giving him his due: "In such a quickly-written draft, bound by the strictest rules, a weak and unlearned hand will not be able to portray all the features that characterize this great genius" (3). (As it happens, Saint-Chamond's footnotes are fully as erudite as Thomas's, much more so than Mercier's, which were sloppily sketchy.)

Saint-Chamond's one explicit comment on gender finds no equivalent in the other two eulogies. All three writers mention Descartes's female patrons, but Saint-Chamond repeats with evident satisfaction the remark by Descartes's first biographer (Adrien Baillet) that the philosopher preferred docile and loyal women disciples to contentious men (48–49). In one of her notes, a tone of bitterness creeps in as she complains about women who join with men in attacking the women writers:

> People of letters are jealous of one another; it's a weakness that can be excusable in those who pursue the same career. . . . Everywhere that men are rivals they can sometimes be enemies; but individuals turned by idleness into eternal judges of those who are busy take pleasure in degrading merit out of the sole pleasure of talking and out of that insatiable desire to show how intelligent *they* are. This is what I find blameworthy especially in women, when one of them dares to take up the pen. Men grant intelligence rather lightly to any woman who pleases them; the others are more severely judged. They always think that someone has dictated the work to them, bad as it might be. You can't take this consolation away from them,

> because it's the last refuge of their vanity. Besides, they also have, I think, a political reason. If women were to reach a certain degree of enlightenment, they would be left in the shadows. It's by force that they have maintained the rights they've arrogated to themselves, and they've joined ruse to force. But since among women everything is equal, and since they're all judged alike, what is their purpose in seeking to diminish the merit of those who write? Is it to prove that they have more? (79–80, n. 23)

Few remarks by women intellectuals of the period testify so poignantly to the absorption of women's words into the dominant masculine discourse. Rushing to join the winning side, Saint-Chamond's women who criticize women writers illustrate just how barren the eighteenth-century ground was for a feminist alternative. Saint-Chamond strikes more than one personal note here. After she had written her eulogy of Sully, the notorious gossip Bachaumont had spread the rumor that she had gotten help on it from one of her supposed lovers.[130] The melancholy passage quoted above is a good illustration of Saint-Chamond's distance from the "man of genius." The man of genius was misunderstood because of his genius; the woman writer was misunderstood because she was a woman. The disparity is reflected in Saint-Chamond's relation to Thomas and Mercier. Because of their complicity with their subject, she is as distant from them as she is from Descartes. Although she plays by the same discursive rules as her competitors, she is not at home in philosophic discourse. Misunderstood even by those of her own gender, without a community of like-minded women such as the de Scudéry's circle, she represents herself as a lone Cartesian woman lost in the masculine Enlightenment.

Descartes Redivivus

Saint-Chamond's subtly gendered response to Descartes stamps her as a distant relative of the seventeenth-century cartésiennes. By the late eighteenth-century, their heady dialogues were a thing of the remote past. An ironic postscript to their activities, which appeared in 1784, is testimony to the discursive distance between the days of Elisabeth and the eve of the French Revolution. The one-act comedy *Le Club des dames, ou le retour de Descartes* (The Ladies' Club, or The

130. Micard, *Ecrivain*, 145n.

Return of Descartes) was published anonymously in Paris. It has been attributed to Stéphanie Félicité de Genlis (1746–1830), the amazingly prolific writer who in 1782 was appointed governess to the children of the duc de Chartres, numbering among whom was the future king of France, Louis-Philippe. However, the play is mentioned neither in Antoine-Alexandre Barbier's *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes et pseudonymes* (Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous Works) (1822–27) nor in the most authoritative recent critical biographies of Genlis.[131] The comedy was not performed. The author tersely informs us in her dedication ("To the Ladies") that the famous actor Molé was enthusiastic about it but that plans for performance were dropped.[132] Like Catherine Descartes's "Relation de la mort de Descartes," the play feminizes the philosopher's discourse, but in quite another manner. Descartes is recalled from his grave to preside over the founding of a club for ladies. Chosen as the most appropriate spokesman for women, he is made to glorify a *sensibilité* that the author identifies as specifically feminine.

More than a century after the comedies of Chappuzeau and Molière were published, women's exclusion from intellectual life still provided playwrights with dramatic fodder. The action of this comedy centers on the formation of a "ladies' club." The project is presented as a reaction to the exclusive, English-style men's clubs, a fad that Grimm's *Correspondance Littéraire* attributes to the decline of the salon that occurred when women moved their social life from their homes to the theater box.[133] Both as a social eating club (30) and as a refuge for philosophes, the institution of the all-male club is experienced by the women in the play as a disparagement of their sex. There are

131. See Gabriel de Broglie, *Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Perrin, 1985), and Alice M. Laborde, *L'Oeuvre de Madame de Genlis* (Paris: Nizet, 1966). Schiebinger, *Mind*, 172, mentions the play. She evidently assumes that it was the work of Madame de Genlis, but she doesn't discuss the issue of authorship.

132. [Stéphanie Félicité Du Crest de Saint-Aubin, comtesse de Genlis], *Le Club des dames, ou le retour de Descartes* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Romans, 1784), v-vi. Whether or not Madame de Genlis was the author of this play, the text provides ample evidence that it was written by a woman. Further references to the play appear in parentheses in the text.

133. See the *Correspondance Littéraire* (May 1786), part 3, 3:484–92. The only two new institutions open to women, the columnist says (489–90), are the Lycée and the Société Olympique, a Freemasons' association. Perhaps the play alluded also to the (male) Freemasons' recent closing of mixed lodges. See Albistur and Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme*, 216. Could the author have been thinking of Margaret Cavendish's play "The Female Academy" (1662)? Written by the celebrated bluestocking who later paid a visit to the Royal Society, the English play deals more favorably with women's struggle for intellectual autonomy than does the French comedy. See Schiebinger, *Mind*, 33–34.

strong hints that the clubs have an intellectual orientation. The heroine of the play, a countess who organizes the ladies' club, refers scornfully to a "Senate of Wise Men" (Sénat de Sages). "To be a true Philosophe," she says to a chevalier who is admitted to her circle, "you shouldn't live with women; your noble character becomes weakened with us; our virtues are too dependent on nature. . . . To betray with audacity; to be enterprising and rash; in a word, to want to dominate—that's what being a man means" (3).

Descartes is chosen as the club's presiding genius because he is "the immortal champion of women" (vi) and "the first man who discovered that we have a soul."[134] This formula is a significant variation of the old slogan "the mind has no sex." It harks back to the pre-Cartesian phase of the *querelle des femmes*, which raised the specter of Aristotle in debates on the question of whether women possessed a soul.[135] Little in the play suggests that Descartes is invoked to raise the banner for a sex-neutral soul. He represents instead the sentimental feminism that took hold at the time of Diderot and Antoine-Léonard Thomas. The men's clubs are seen as "contending with us for the sensibility of soul [sensibilité d'âme] that Descartes assigns us" (9). A marquis, who has been summoned by the Countess to give her a crash course in Cartesian philosophy before Descartes's arrival, summarizes the philosopher's achievements: "Descartes, a unique man and inconceivable genius, taught man to think naturally, freely, frankly. He left all book learning in order to turn to nature for what is human, true, and pleasant. From the depths of scholastic chaos, he proceeded to the loveliest system of sweetness, love, and union among men." The Countess's question, "So he was a man of sentiment?" (homme sensible), is answered in the affirmative (16–17).

The sentimentalizing of Descartes, which valorizes the women as creatures of sensibilité, suggests a system of unequal but complementary gender relations in which masculine reason is counterposed by feminine sentiment. This arrangement is not inconsistent with the views that Madame de Genlis expresses in her biography of literary women, *De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française* (The Influence of Women on French Literature) (1811). There Genlis attributes the lack of women "geniuses" to inequality in education. Women, however, have their own brand of "genius." It consists of "all the

134. Genlis, *Club*, 9. See also the dedicatory poem.

135. For a succinct summary of this phase of the querelle, see Pierre Darmon, *Mythologie de la femme dans l'ancienne France, XVIe-XIXe siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 19–24.

qualities [women] are not begrudged and which they can possess in the highest degree: imagination, sensibilité, loftiness of soul."[136] Genlis's strategy is never to claim native equality of reason for women, which would risk masculinizing them, but rather to emphasize the essentially "feminine" ingredients of genius. For her, it is not the mind, but rather moral sentiment, which has no sex: "The faculty of feeling and admiring the great and the beautiful, and the capacity for loving are the same in both sexes: thus there is perfect moral equality between them" (1:xiv). Genlis argues for the preservation of a sex-gender system in which modest, unassuming women inhabit their separate sphere. Speaking from personal experience, she sees no reason why a woman writer can't both gain due recognition and yet practice her craft from within the confines of domesticity, with the reticence appropriate to her sex (1:xx-xl).

The Descartes of *Le Club des dames* has been brushed up and modernized to fit in with eighteenth-century sensibilité. Yet he is also the relic of a past noted for its ladies' clubs, or feminocentric salons. In *De l'influence des femmes*, Genlis idealizes the good old days in which women authors received the recognition they deserved. She marvels that Madeleine de Scudéry made no enemies when she won the first award the Académie Française gave for eloquence, and she cites Anne de la Vigne's celebratory ode to the victor as evidence of the respect that de Scudéry earned for her sex (1:149–50). It is even more interesting that she cites with strong approval the alternative version of Descartes's death from Catherine Descartes's "Relation de la mort de Descartes": "Mademoiselle Descartes, niece of the famous philosopher René Descartes, was worthy of upholding the honor of his fine name. She wrote ingeniously in verse and in prose" (1:208–9).

Genlis's praise for Catherine Descartes is bathed in the nostalgia with which she portrays the seventeenth century. In this context, the citation does not reflect the critical spirit of the poem, but rather a longing for the days in which such criticism might have been possible. Seen through the rose-colored lenses of the early nineteenth century, Catherine Descartes lived at a time when women writers could express themselves more freely:

> In the century of Louis XIV, which witnessed so many men of eminent talent, and the brilliance of all the sublime geniuses who

136. Madame de Genlis, *De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française*, 2 vols. (Paris: Lecointe et Durey, 1826), 1:ix. Further references, in parentheses in the text, will be to this edition.

> have immortalized French literature—in that century when manners were much more serious than ours, there was a multitude of women authors in every genre and category. Not only did people of letters not fulminate against them, not declaim against women authors, but they were pleased to praise them and to render them the homage of estime and gallantry. This conduct and procedure should not surprise us. At that time there could not reasonably be any *writers' rivalry* between men and women, and we know that indisputable superiority is always indulgent, that strength is always generous. (1:li-lii)

Genlis's idealization of the seventeenth century blinds her to the fact that women's exclusion from official academies, which she deplores in her own time, originated in the age she admires so much. In her anger against the philosophes, a passion that dominated much of her writing, she assimilates them to academicians: "Men who assign rank in literature, for they're the ones who dispense the honors and distribute the places from which all women are excluded, often celebrate mediocre talent. For example, if d'Alembert had been neither a geometer nor an academician, his writings, which are so cold and deprived of grace, thought, and naturalness—notwithstanding his relentless attacks on religion and his scorn for kings and for France—would be forgotten by now" (1:xvi-xvii). The quip about the "Senate of wise men" in *Le Club des dames* suggests that the men's clubs are like academies. When the Marquise asks if the women should give Descartes an "academic reception," the Baroness casts her vote for something simpler (23). In the play, too, there is an understandable confusion between the academician and the philosophe (by the time of the play many philosophes had become academicians), for it is the "philosophe" to whom the Countess directs her sarcasm about sex-segregation.

Le Club des dames takes an antiphilosophe stand against both the exclusivity of the male intellectuals and against philosophic reason. The revisionist view of Descartes as a bearer of sentiment and morality rather than of reason subverts the tradition that hailed Descartes as a progenitor of philosophic spirit. It coopts Descartes for the "feminine" side of feeling. Over a century after the members of de Scudéry's circle criticized Descartes's soulless mechanism, this play omits the criticism and simply tells a new story. Because eighteenth-century sensibilité belonged as much to the philosophes as it did to women, however, the play's battle lines are poorly drawn. The fuss is not so

much over any discursive competition between salon and academy in the manner of the seventeenth century as over the women's desire for a recognition of their independent identity. "Like you, Messieurs," the Countess says, "we are going to meet together and be self-sufficient" (4).

The hero of this comedy nevertheless shares some philosophic traits with the man eulogized for the Académie Française in 1765. He is glorified for his contribution to the progress of human reason: "There is nothing in modern ideas which wasn't contained in the ideas of Descartes," the Marquis says. "Truth is one, unique, and it lasts eternally." Descartes's originality lay in his method: "Certainly he didn't invent truth," the Marquis continues, "but he invented the means to recognize error, which governed the world in the place of that truth which lay concealed behind it" (20).

Nevertheless, the text also devalues both Descartes's method and the idea of progress. Ironically, Descartes is credited with refuting a mechanistic misogyny: "We owe him honors," the Countess says, "without him men might still take us for machines" (23). The only other appearance of Cartesian mechanism is in the lyrics of a concluding *vaudeville*: "The universe is a machine / Where everyone sings in unison." The refrain, playing on the word "tourbillon," reflects the changed eighteenth-century lexicon in which the technical sense of Descartes's *tourbillons* (vortices) was metaphorized in general usage (*tourbillon* also means "whirlwind," or "social whirl"): "Everything in life is a whirlwind" (38). The progress to which Descartes is said to have contributed turns out to be a mockery. To the honored guest's query about changes in France since his day, the Countess replies that his work launched an unbelievable progress of knowledge. The Baroness says, "People write a lot. Brochures rain down on us. After the English manner, we've established public Papers, Newspapers: people read everything, understand everything, and everyone is intelligent." The Viscountess adds, "Intelligence itself has become a fad . . . sensibilité may have lost out." The Marquise speaks of the "revolution in Philosophy," the tone of which is not so serious as it used to be now that it "even allows for elegant fashion" (26–27).

De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française makes it clear that Madame de Genlis's nostalgia for seventeenth-century France went hand-in-hand with her loathing of the philosophes. For her, the great writers of Louis XIV's day, pious and patriotic, were models of intellectual deportment. Unlike the philosophes, they did not hypocritically sneak seditious remarks into works meant to be received as

literary masterpieces; their style was free and open. "The government was without distrust, because minds were not mutely in ferment and in no genre was there any inclination to revolt. And so never have people written with such freedom as during this reign" (1:136). If Madame de Genlis was in fact the author of *Le Club des dames*, there is a twist to the tale. In 1782, after the publication of her *Adèle et Théodore* sounded the battle cry between her and the philosophes, d'Alembert, as she tells it, came to her with a peace offering. If she would cease her attacks on the *Encyclopédie*, he would propose the creation of four seats for women in the Académie Française, with one reserved for her. Genlis firmly declined. She didn't want to be bought off, and her election would not have been assured in any event. The consequences of the unsuccessful negotiations, according to her latest biographer's somewhat exaggerated account, were dramatic: "It was in this way that the Age of Enlightenment failed to open the Academy's doors to women."[137]

The Descartes of *Le Club des dames* takes a stand against the kind of bullying to which Genlis felt subjected by d'Alembert's offer. Before Descartes's appearance on the stage of history "[men] had arranged / to rule alone, to dominate women" (Dedication). But the value of the club to which he lends his protection is not at all clear. In their philosophical pretensions, the women are ridiculous, as well they should be. Why in the dramatic framework of this satire would female philosophes be any less objectionable than their male role models? As an apology for sentiment against reason, the play is unconvincing. The most sympathetic character of the play, the Viscountess, speaks for the power of love to reunite the estranged sexes, but in a distinctly seventeenth-century tone of reason and moderation. She questions the "extreme" opinions of the Marquise, who warns against men's perfidy and imperialism (11–14). The Viscountess makes the other ladies look like précieuses ridicules reincarnated.

Le Club des dames, then, can be read as a satire of both the philosophes and the lady Cartesians, with their intellectual airs and pretensions. The strategy of reclaiming Descartes for sentiment and feeling, which is entirely consistent with the Viscountess's sympathetic role, undermines the value of the philosophic Cartesian heritage. The women's claim to rival the men with their own institution brings them perilously close to the despised philosophic camp.

137. De Broglie, *Genlis*, 118–19.

But the comedy can also be read as a reaction to a battle already won. By 1784, after all, the institutional hegemony of male intellectuals was well established. The formation of men's clubs was the addition of insult to injury and perhaps also an uncanny forecast of things to come: the closing of the Jacobin clubs to women in 1793, the denial of suffrage to women. By reviving the shade of Descartes that was a vehicle of poetic debate between two of the preceding century's cartésiennes, the author turned nostalgically to the period before the new discourse had risen to (masculine) dominance. From the author's historical perspective, now was the time to get back to basics: do women have a soul? Descartes remains an ambiguous figure for the strategy of separating the sexes into their respective spheres of reason and sentiment. In his deformation as a hero of sensibilité, he still retains something of his old gender-neutral form, for sensibilité, as Madame de Genlis said, was shared by both sexes. That reason may also have been shared surely lurks as a potential debate behind this drawing-room Descartes. If on the eve of the French Revolution the equality of Cartesian reason was a dead issue for women, why revive it with Descartes's ghost?

Le Club des dames in a sense gives up on the seventeenth-century cartésiennes' struggle to temper the "scientific realism" of rational discourse with moral concerns. The Cartesian women had taken the opportunity offered by a mind with no sex to protest the severing of "value" from "fact" and of subjective consciousness from objective truth.[138] From Elisabeth's unwillingness to transcend the demands of the emotions and the body to the antimechanistic writings of the de Scudéry circle, these concerns are paramount. In championing the feminine sphere of sentiment, *Le Club des dames* abandons the dialogue with men for a separate women's culture. For the lively intellectual exchange of the earlier period, it substitutes the countermeasure of the excluded. Such defections contributed to the development of that major discourse on the feminine which is inscribed in the notion of separate spheres.

The new women's culture of moral sentiment glorified by the eighteenth-century satire is certainly not without its ties to the past. The

138. I use Helen Longino's terms here. See Helen Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 62. See my Introduction, 11–12, above.

morality of Elisabeth and the de Scudéry circle centers on the power of feeling and subjectivity to humanize rational discourse. Claire-Marie de Saint-Chamond, in commemorating Descartes as a moral philosopher, continues the tradition of giving priority to the moral domain. *Le Club des dames* points ahead not to a feminized science, however, as the salonnières it satirizes seemed to do, but to a long period of confinement for learned women. Instead of harnessing their moral purpose to the construction of a feminist alternative, the ladies of this club withdraw from rational discourse altogether. They seem to counter Saint-Chamond's hypothesis that with women's enlightenment, men would be "left in the shadows."

3

Fontenelle and the Ladies

Because he lived for an entire century, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757) is the perfect transitional figure from the world of the cartésiennes to a discursive universe that made no place for them. It was during his lifetime, and thanks partly to him, that the Cartesian subversion of prejudices was transformed into Enlightenment discourse.[1] In the effort by a vanguard of philosophes to replace as wide a range of prejudices as possible with universal truths, gender and cultural difference were assimilated to the "enlightened" model. The forces of light militated against any deviation from their path. The Revolution's use of Rousseauean virtue for social and political control is a case in point; it is an instance of how the totalizing aspect of the Enlightenment lent itself to coercive universalization.[2]

Through the vicissitudes of philosophical change which brought Newton to ever greater prominence, Fontenelle remained a committed Cartesian. As a member of three of Paris's prestigious royal academies and secretary of the Académie des Sciences from 1697, he was at the epicenter of French intellectual life. In 1686 he published the first edition of perhaps his most influential work, the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds). It staged a drama not unlike that which was played out between seventeenth-century cartésiens and cartésiennes. But in curtailing the reci-

1. The classic discussion of intellectual change during this period is Paul Hazard, *The European Mind (1680–1715)*, trans. J. Lewis May (London: Hollis and Carter, 1953).

2. For a discussion of the transformation of Rousseau's concept of virtue by the discourse of the Revolution, see Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

procity of the dialogue, Fontenelle's script anticipates the historical conclusion to the drama. The *Entretiens* consisted of five "conversations" on the astronomical and cultural implications of the Copernican system between a sophisticated Cartesian "Philosopher" and his pupil, a charmingly naïve Marquise. The conversations' setting in the Marquise's garden is rather like an outdoor salon. (It was in Madeleine de Scudéry's garden that much of the observation of the chameleons took place. Her *conversations* are also frequently set in gardens.) In 1687 Fontenelle added a sixth "evening," and he continued to revise the *Entretiens* down to 1742. Through this one work, then, we can follow the philosophical trajectory of an age that bridges the gap between the seventeenth-century cartésiennes and *Le Club des dames*.

The *Entretiens* was enormously successful. Thirty-three editions of the work, translations into several languages, and various imitations all appeared during Fontenelle's lifetime. His Marquise signified to the public not so much an individual Cartesian pupil nor indeed an expanded intellectual role for women as she did a general accessibility not unlike that of the *Discourse on Method*. Although the *Entretiens* is often cited as a classic example of popularized science, little attention has been given to the meanings of the feminine interlocutor who figures its accessibility. The Marquise in a sense enacts Descartes's statement to Father Vatier on the ease with which "even women" could grasp the new philosophy. This avatar of the cartésienne, however, loses her individuality to the cause of (masculine) enlightenment. Her intellectual journey recapitulates and illustrates the historical journey of Cartesian women from active participation to effacement.

Fontenelle appears to have filled an intellectual need, for recent research suggests that the cultivated lay public of the 1680s had not yet been won over to heliocentrism in large numbers.[3] Paul Hazard has called the *Entretiens* "an introduction, profound but engaging, to a new interpretation of the universe."[4] The *Entretiens* was also a postface to Descartes. Along with the Cartesian legacy of clarity, simplicity, and objectivity, Fontenelle adopted a Cartesian cosmology. The dialogue of the Philosopher and the Marquise recalls Descartes's correspondence with Elisabeth of Bohemia. But in explicitly opening

3. See Marie-Françoise Mortureux, *La Formation et le fonctionnement d'un discours de la vulgarisation scientifique au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Didier Erudition, 1983), 116–25.

4. Hazard, *European Mind*, 302.

the evening "conversations" to the public, Fontenelle's fiction lets the Marquise act as a spokesperson for a discourse in which Elisabeth had actively intervened at an earlier, more open phase. Who this public was and why the author's chosen figure for it should be feminine have remained something of a mystery. At least one woman, the eighteenth-century novelist Marie Anne de Roumier Robert, has left us the response of a feminine reader. Through her testimony and through an interrogation of the *Entretiens* and related works, we will try to uncover the path that led to the suppression of the feminist alternative.

How Did the Marquise Get So Smart?

It was undoubtedly the Cartesian in him that led Fontenelle to adopt the opera as his central metaphor in the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes.*[5] On the first evening, the philosopher initiates the Marquise into a cosmology that contradicts sensory evidence. By way of illustration he offers her his operatic image:

> I imagine that Nature is a great Spectacle, which resembles an Opera. From where you sit in the Opera, you don't see the Theater exactly as it is. The Decorations and Machines have been arranged in order to create a pleasing effect from afar, and the wheels and counterweights that create all the motions have been hidden from your view. So you don't have to bother guessing how everything is done. Only some stagehand hidden in the orchestra might perhaps be interested in an extraordinary Flight and might want to know exactly how it was executed. You see, the Stagehand is rather like Philosophers. But what increases the difficulty for Philosophers is that in the Machines that Nature presents to our view, the cords are so perfectly hidden that we have taken a long time to guess what causes the motions of the Universe. (17–18)

Fontenelle brings an interesting modification to Descartes's use of the theatrum mundi commonplace.[6] Nature is now a fully mechanized

5. All of the references to Fontenelle, which are cited in parentheses in the text, are to Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. Alexandre Calame (Paris: Didier, 1966).

6. Fontenelle reproduces the image again, in a context that emphasizes the need for an objective spectator, in his *Histoire des oracles* (1686). He speaks of the need to find an impartial historian "who would be a spectator of everything, indifferent and attentive." Fontenelle, *Histoire des oracles*, ed. Louis Maigron (Paris: Edouard Cornély: Société des Textes Modernes Français, 1908), 34.

spectacle with no one to get it going. When the prime mover is taken out of the picture, the important agents become explanatory. (The Christian God does not figure importantly in the *Entretiens*.)[7] It is the philosopher sitting in the audience with his "backstage" understanding who counts. Fontenelle all but apotheosizes Descartes (along with "some other Moderns"), whose role it was to dispel ancient myths about what was going on behind the scenes (17–20). His Philosopher is not positioned in the pit with the audience, but rather at an unspecified vantage point from which he can reveal the spectacle to the Marquise: "I have only to draw the curtain and to show you the world" (21). The teacher is a kind of superspectator, a master of ceremonies or tour guide who can induct the Marquise into the mysteries of the performance.

Fontenelle externalizes Descartes's image of the spectator, literally pushing the viewer into outer space. As Descartes asked Elisabeth to join him in viewing the human comedy from a moral elevation, so the Philosopher asks the Marquise to view our planet from the heavens. "You must simply be a Spectator of the World, and not an Inhabitant," he tells her (51). Her response to this invitation is similar to Elisabeth's. She remains emotionally rooted in her own planet, unable to shake off the mentality of the earthling. This strong identification with her native globe may be taken as a metaphor for subjectivity. The Marquise's language, like Elisabeth's, is colored by the emotion of the subject; Fontenelle's pupil refuses "scientific" detachment. The Philosopher, in contrast with Descartes vis-à-vis Elisabeth, does not engage in a true intellectual exchange with the Marquise. As her mentor, he aims to change her perspective and to introduce her to a new mode of thought.

The distance between the subjective immanence of the Marquise and the transcendence of her feelings toward objectivity that her teacher demands of her may be measured by their respective use of the pronoun *nous*. The mentor's first person plural has the ambiguity of the shifter, which Philip Lewis perceptively discusses in connection with La Rochefoucauld.[8] The Philosopher says: "We want to

7. For a good discussion of Fontenelle's metaphysics, see Alain Niderst, "Fontenelle et la science de son temps," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 228 (1984): 171–78.

8. See Philip E. Lewis, *La Rochefoucauld: The Art of Abstraction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). In French, the first-person plural pronoun *nous* is at once subject, "we," and object, "us." Marie-Françoise Mortureux in her comments on the ambiguity of the first person plural pronoun does not include this instance of it. Mortureux, *Formation et fonctionnement*, 187–91.

judge everything, but we always have a poor point of view. We want to judge ourselves, we're too close; we want to judge others, we're too far away" (50). The subject pronoun he uses, at once subject of the utterance and subject of the enunciation, conceals this basic split in its identity by explicitly counterposing itself to the object pronoun *nous*, which is on a level with the other objects, "everything" and "others." In order to judge ourselves, we must alienate our subjectivity in what Evelyn Fox Keller has called the "objectivist illusion."[9] The thinking subject must remain impassive before the self as object. The subject pronoun is drained of its subjectivity as it transforms itself into a pure object of disinterested judgment and scientific investigation.[10] The Marquise demonstrates, in Timothy J. Reiss's terms, a "responsibility of enunciation" in identifying both herself and her mentor with a resolutely earthbound "nous": "'I will never console myself,' she said, 'for the injustice we do the Earth and for our too favorable predisposition to the Moon [in thinking it alone is luminous], unless you assure me that the People of the Moon don't understand their advantages any better than we do ours and that they take our Earth for a Star, without knowing that their dwelling place is one too.'" (51).[11]

In consistently assuming the earthbound condition of her subjectivity, the Marquise humanizes her mentor's astronomy lessons. Of the Copernican system she says, "That's rather amusing . . . the Earth takes on everything itself, and the Sun doesn't do anything" (34). Into her "nous," a comic contrast with the Philosopher's detached subject, she pours the partisan feeling of embattled geocentricity. The Philosopher, on the other hand, seems to want the perspective of a lunarian in which an ideally detached subject could observe its alter ego, the objectified "nous": "If we were able to possess reason and yet not be Men, and if we lived on the Moon, would we be able to imagine that there existed on earth that bizarre species of creature called Human? Could we imagine something that had

9. See Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 70.

10. Mortureux, *Formation et fonctionnement*, 280–81, notes that in the first "evening" the subject of enunciation is effaced behind sentences containing scientific propositions. She sees this effacement as the subject of enunciation's claim to be the interpreter, not the author, of the astronomy in the first lesson.

11. Fontenelle, *Entretiens*, 51. On the "responsibility of enunciation," see Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) 42. Mortureux comments that the *Entretiens* reflects a new geocentrism in which the earth, no longer the center of the universe, becomes its "measure." See *Formation et fonctionnement*, 361.

such mad passions and such wise thoughts? . . . The Moon People would need to have much wit in order to divine that. We recognize ourselves for who we are, and we still don't understand our own nature" (66–67). The Marquise's response is devoid of reflexivity. Her "nous" defines itself against the lunar Other in a kind of Cold War mentality: "We're safe as far as the Moon People go . . . they won't figure us out; but I wish that we could figure them out; because, really, it's worrisome to know that they're up there in that Moon which we see and not to be able to imagine what they're like" (67).

In the context of the new science, the Marquise's subjectivity and consequent humanization of the world become categorized as mythical thought. One of the best jokes in the book, the Philosopher's offer to a nervous Marquise to have elephants support the earth in celestial matter, is borrowed from the voyager François Bernier's report of an Indian myth. In response to the Marquise's idea that the Indians would have doubled the number of elephants had they known that the earth was "in danger of moving," her mentor merely laughs (37–38). This laughter, which recurs (e.g. 72), seems to echo the gods' Olympian laughter at their own human creations, a scene that the Philosopher evokes in his speculations on the inhabitants of the moon (67). Elsewhere he subtly suggests that the Marquise's is a "savage mind," anchored in primitive patterns of thought. He scoffs at her skepticism about the possibility of interstellar travel and visitors from outer space, likening it to the ignorant surprise of the American Indians at the arrival of the Europeans on their shores (70–72).

The Marquise's need for design in the universe, for security and certainty—"I need to believe," she says (78)—locates her in the realm of the prescientific, the mythic, and the primitive. The mission taken on by her teacher is to draw her into the modern world, to convert her to the discourse of objectivity. To this end, the evenings, or lessons, get progressively more difficult, so that by the sixth and last the teacher can congratulate his pupil on having achieved the ability to reason (although he must warn her about premature systematizing): "Here, Madame, . . . is a bit of a beginning of a System that you have successfully built" (176). Unable to free herself sufficiently from the archaic need for security to be able to tolerate the uncertainty of competing hypotheses on the habitability of the moon, the Marquise at least learns how to ask "why not?"[12] She is brought, in other

12. Fontenelle, *Entretiens*, 91. The question is echoed by Mademoiselle de L'Espinasse in Diderot's *Rêve de d'Alembert* (composed in 1769), a work much indebted to Fontenelle's *Entretiens*. See Denis Diderot, *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, in Diderot, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1961), 302.

words, to the point at which Elisabeth of Bohemia began, the moment of doubt and suspension of judgment, the necessary precondition for the development of objectivity.

In this parable of enlightenment, it is highly significant that the pupil is female and that the many layers of her metaphorical meaning specify different aspects of femininity. It is she who speaks for the concrete—"Let's get down to facts," she says (77)—and for the imagination and the senses. Like those for whom Copernican theory was unacceptable because unconfirmed by sensory evidence, she says of the plurality of worlds: "My reason is sufficiently persuaded, but my imagination is overwhelmed" (95). Her attachment to the concrete, the sensory, and the mythic link her to nature; and in her encounters with her mentor, it is tempting to see the meeting of Nature and Reason. But Fontenelle, in the prefatory letter to Monsieur L——, explicitly links her to the goddess Wisdom. Noémi Hepp surely exaggerates in calling the Marquise "the first feminine figure endowed with intellectual life." She more plausibly argues that the Philosopher's pupil is intelligent but "dominated by her affectivity."[13] Although less learned than Minerva, the Marquise, with her native common sense (bon sens) receptive to the training of a master, is the very figure of *docta ignorantia*. The Philosopher says to his correspondent: "Don't you think that if Wisdom herself wanted to make a favorable appearance in the world, she wouldn't do badly to adopt the guise of someone like the Marquise? . . . For my part, I consider her erudite, because of the great ease with which she could become so" (11). At the same time, her naïveté and the historical association of women and children lend her the attributes of a child. In chiding her for her fear of comets the Philosopher likens her to a child: "They only frighten children" (145–46).

The English novelist and playwright Aphra Behn, whose translation of the *Entretiens* appeared in 1688 under the title "A Discovery of New Worlds," sensed the Marquise's ambiguity. The appeal of the female protagonist was one of her motives for undertaking the translation in the first place. She quickly, however, came to see the Marquise's contradictory nature: "[Fontenelle] makes her say a great many very silly things, tho' sometimes she makes Observations so learned, that the greatest Philosophers in *Europe* could make no better."[14]

13. Noémi Hepp, "Images féminines dans l'oeuvre du jeune Fontenelle," in *Fontenelle: Actes du colloque tenu à Rouen du 6 au 10 octobre 1987*, ed. Alain Niderst (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 624–25.

14. [Aphra] Behn, *Histories, Novels, and Translations* (London: W. O. for S. B., 1700), 2:1, 7.

Fontenelle's prefatory remarks inform us that the Marquise with her multilayered femininity is the component of pleasure in the classical formula of pleasure and instruction: "In these Conversations I've placed a Woman who is receiving instruction in things she's never heard of. I thought that this fiction would help me to make the Work more pleasurable" (5). The principle of textual embellishment embodied in the Marquise is not the proverbial coating of the pill in what has commonly been seen as an effort at scientific popularization. She is as it were the soul of Fontenelle's scientific discourse, with her message that science is pleasurable—so pleasurable and so easy that even a woman can learn it.[15] The occasional *compliments galants* that Fontenelle intersperses in his lessons remind us of the pleasure that should inhere in the educational enterprise. Fontenelle underscores this pleasure by advising his female readers that the *Entretiens* is just as accessible as *La Princesse de Clèves* (6), and he compares mathematical reasoning to the casuistry of love: "If you grant a small favor to a Lover, you will soon afterward have to grant him more, and eventually that can go far. In the same way, grant a Mathematician the slightest principle and he will draw a consequence from it that you'll have to grant him too, and from that consequence yet another; and in spite of yourself he will lead you farther than you would ever have thought possible" (138).

The suggestion that the language of mathematics can be translated into the language of love is more than a conceit. Like the French of the *Discourse on Method*, it expresses the Cartesian project of sweeping away the obfuscations of antiquated erudition with the clarity and familiarity of a native language. The *Entretiens* opens with a conundrum about translation: Cicero resolved his problem about a readership for his philosophical translations from the Greek by ultimately appealing to everyone, but Fontenelle in wanting to write unphilosophically about philosophy fears that he will alienate both society people (gens du monde) and scholars (sçavans). What he wants is "a middle ground on which Philosophy can be suitable for everyone" (3–4). As a figure for the "everyone" to whom Fontenelle's unphilosophical philosophical language is directed, the Marquise is at once a pretext for and principle of newly intelligible scientific dis-

15. Georges Van Den Abbeele has seen the Marquise as the "very figure of figuration itself, the representation of the pleasure of representation." See his "*Fabula est Mundus*: On the Plurality of Fontenelle's 'Worlds,'" *Biblio* 17, *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature* (1990): 165–80.

course. At the same time, she is the Other (child-woman) against whom the power of the discourse is tested.

A woman was of course the logical choice of figure for an "everyone" that was largely uninitiated into the mysteries of science and philosophy. Nevertheless, the choice was problematic. In his preface, Fontenelle tells us that he means the Marquise as an encouragement and example to ladies who would like to acquire learning (5). Her intellectual journey, the Philosopher writes to Monsieur L——, is to culminate in her conversion to "the party of Philosophy" (10–11), a signal victory for her mentor and for scientific discourse. Yet what are we to think of the concluding sentence of the *Entretiens*, which sends the Marquise right back to her separate sphere and seems to exclude her from the very territory that she was finally able to enter? The Philosopher, speaking of a European "genius" that extends beyond the *sciences* and "dry speculations" to "pleasurable things," says to the Marquise: "It's [the pleasurable things] with which it is your business to occupy yourself, and which should make up your entire Philosophy" (179).

The richly metaphorical inclusion of the Marquise in the scientific discourse of objectivity and her ultimate exclusion from it at the very moment of her "conversion" reproduce the complexities in the usage of the first person plural pronoun as it appears in the *Entretiens*. At the center of the Philosopher's didactic "nous" ("We want to judge ourselves") is a fracture: subject confronts object. It is difficult to pin down the identity of the abstract subject in the master's "nous": who judges whom? But it is less difficult to locate the Marquise among the judged. In the gesture of reflexivity, the addressee belongs on the side of the object, for the addresser is after all trying to inculcate in her (them) the self-consciousness that he already possesses. Although Fontenelle's subject pronoun would seem generously to include master and pupil, it establishes a false complicity that is denounced by the Marquise's earthbound "nous." The mentor brackets his subjectivity and speaks from on high to the Marquise, who remains firmly on the ground, loyal to her earth.

If Fontenelle's goal is to convert the Other to the "party of philosophy," this other must remain forever convertible for the *Entretiens* to retain its effectiveness as instruction. If he wishes to show the accessibility of the new discourse, its access must be always about to open in order to allow entrants the foretaste of victory. Accessibility is after all only a potentiality inscribed in closure. The Marquise, then, must ultimately remain outside the discourse of objectivity, hovering

at its periphery. Fontenelle's falsely inclusive "nous" in fact objectifies the Marquise, conferring on her prescientific, mythic subjectivity the status of object of scientific examination. But in this moment her subjectivity is canceled.[16] Extinguished by the clear light of reason, the "prejudices" that her thinking represents are nullified by the science that preempts them. The Cartesian doubt that allowed room for Catherine Descartes to question her uncle's philosophy has become absorbed in an already constructed discourse of scientific certainty. The discursive space opened in the correspondence between Descartes and Elisabeth now appears closed.

The problem of what I will call the spectator-subject, encapsulated in Fontenelle's ambiguous use of the first person plural subject/object pronoun, underlies the discourse of what has been called French classicism. By creating the persona of a cosmic master of ceremonies who shows an objectified Marquise the earth in perspective, Fontenelle in a sense solves this problem, which remains implicit in other literature of the period. Ultimately, of course, the objectification of the Marquise and the concealment of the narrator's identity behind a facade of omniscience defer the responsibility of subjectivity. The identity and relationship of addresser and addressee are put most acutely in question by the manipulation of perspective. Critics have commonly formulated the problem in Pascal's *pensée*, the "Disproportion of man," as that of the interlocutor's identity: was it to a freethinker that Pascal addressed his devastating summary of the human condition? Yet Pascal's questions "What is a man in the infinite?" and "What is man in nature?" immediately implicate the spectator-subject (the addresser in this case), who is after all a man in nature. It is interesting that Pascal in the "Disproportion" initially uses "man" and the third person singular to paint his picture of human suspension in infinity, switching to "nous" in a reflective moment ("In vain do we inflate our ideas beyond imaginable space; we beget only atoms in comparison to the reality of things") and to the impersonal "on" (one) to mark the passage to a higher order ("When one is educated, one understands that nature has engraved its image and that of its author on all things, and therefore that they almost all derive from his double infinity") (Brunschvicg ed., no. 72). In his objectification of both man and nature, Pascal problematizes the rela-

16. Van Den Abbeele, "Fabula," 178, argues that the Marquise evolves from an "erotic *object* of science" to an empowered thinking subject.

tions of addresser to addressee and spectator to the perceived, leaving us uncertain as to just how inclusive the universals "on" and "nous" may be.

The spectator-subject is at home in a shifting perspective that invites the addressee to cast a critical eye on him/herself and to play catch-as-catch-can with the addresser, who may or may not be within the perspective surveyed. La Rochefoucauld is perhaps the perfect exemplar of the "classical" construction of a perspective of objectivity. "Men and affairs have their perspective. There are those that you have to see up close in order to judge them accurately and others that are best appraised from afar."[17] Here, as in Pascal's "Disproportion," there is no reason to believe that the addresser should not be included among "men," yet disengagement grants to the spectator-subject (what Philip Lewis calls the abstract subject in the case of La Rochefoucauld) a certain specular immunity. The play of identification and distantiation between addresser and addressee, which Lewis sees as ideological (179–83), universalizes everything that it does not abstract from the subject.

The spectator-subject also implicates the object (when object coincides with addressee) in its deferral of responsibility. For to the extent that the subject abstracts from itself its gender, class, or skin color, for instance, it abstracts the addressee, with whom it claims solidarity, from these same conditions. Although Fontenelle specifies his speaker in another discourse as female, he also casts her as a representative of "everyone." Just how accessible did he want the new discourse to be, if, finally, women and "everyone" stand outside it? In a letter to the *Histoire des ouvrages des savans* (History of Scholarly Works) (1699), Fontenelle reveals that "the ignorant" were his "real Marquises."[18] Like other scientifically minded men of his time, Fontenelle stumbled over the problem of accessibility. In a society where not much important information was accessible to anyone, it became important to view science as open to all. In reality, however, science created its own educated initiates. By the time of Fontenelle's official appointment as secretary of the Académie des Sciences in 1699, this tension had materialized in the establishment of a power elite of official scientists who nonetheless conserved the ideal of a vast diffusion of knowledge. In the preface to the *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences*

17. La Rochefoucauld, François duc de. *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales*, ed. Jacques Truchet (Paris: Garnier, 1961), no. 104.

18. [H. Basnage de Beauval] *Histoire des ouvrages des savans* (Amsterdam: September 1699), 416.

(History of the Royal Academy of Sciences) for the year 1699, Fontenelle first writes: "We have tried to make this History suitable for the greatest number of people possible" and then states: "Such is the fate of the Sciences when they are handled by a small number of people; the advantages of their progress are invisible to the majority."[19] In the sixth evening of the *Entretiens*, the Philosopher leans much more heavily toward elitism: "Let's rest content with being a little chosen band of believers [in the inhabitants of other planets], and let's not divulge our Mysteries to the People" (158).

When he founded the Académie des Sciences in 1666, Louis XIV officially recognized scientific and technological expertise as a source of power. The Académie was of crucial importance for Colbert's program of mercantilist expansion.[20] This new collusion of science and power in the furtherance of Colbert's economic goals was bound to contradict the Cartesian aims of universal accessibility to scientific method and the use of science for the betterment of humanity. It was a contradiction that Descartes dimly foresaw when he recorded, in the sixth part of the *Discourse on Method*, his struggles with the problem of whether or not to publish his treatise *Le Monde* (The World). Descartes was aware of the potentially vexing consequences not only of publishing geocentric theory, but also of looking to the state for support in conducting the many experiments necessary to his enterprise. His conclusion, a declaration of independence from the state (a declaration that he compromised by his service to Queen Christina with its fatal conclusion in Stockholm), represents not so much his individual idiosyncrasy as his distance from the next generation of men of science.

The institutionalization of science in France marks a moment of rupture. Science linked to economic policy took on the character of a state secret. Although the *Journal des Sçavans* served as an official organ of publication for the Académie, and although from 1667 on, academic findings were published, the public was not admitted to the regular meetings of the scientific body. By 1699, when the Académie underwent major reorganization, this body had gained control over all kinds of scientific activity in France. It was only after its inspection of machines sent by the crown, to cite one of the more obvious in-

19. Cf. Marie-Françoise Mortureux, "Les Enjeux de l'entreprise de Fontenelle dans les 'Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes," in *Fontenelle*, ed. Niderst, 113–14.

20. See my *Ideology and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 225–32.

stances, that a royal *privilège* was granted.[21] Nothing in the rhetoric of the Académie's official publications, however, suggests that its members abandoned the democratic vision of a method for the use of anyone who wanted to uncover the truths of nature. Yet it was behind the closed doors of the Académie that science was constructed as power for the elite.

The all-male Académie des Sciences was the decisive player in the struggle for intellectual prestige between the salon and the academy. The increasing importance of this institution destabilized the equation that had female to *cercle* as male to *académie*. Poullain de la Barre, writing in the 1670s, saw the cercle as a kind of second-class academy, a center for women's culture: "Balls, comedies, and fashion are the subject of their conversations: they see the cercles as famous Academies, where they go to learn all the news of their sex."[22] This inequality, which Fontenelle as a member of three official academies took for granted, became for Poullain the basis of an agenda of change. Having frequented Richesource's informal Académie des Orateurs, which offered public lectures to both men and women[23], Poullain saw the institutionalization of academies as a decisive step in the exclusion of women from a dominant culture: "They [men] founded Academies, to which women were not invited; and in this way [women] were excluded from learning [des sciences], as they were from everything else" (28).

Women, then, were left with the discourse of polite society: "There are branches of learning [des sciences] that you never hear women talk about, because they aren't fashionable or socially acceptable. Algebra, Geometry, Optics rarely leave the study or the Academy of learning to come out into society" (57–58). In contrast to the final picture of Fontenelle's Marquise, presiding over the feminine domain

21. Roger Hahn, *The Anatomy of a Scientific Institution: The Paris Academy of Sciences, 1666–1803* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 16–18, 59–60.

22. François Poullain de la Barre, *De l'égalité des deux sexes, discours physique et moral, où l'on voit l'importance de se défaire des préjugez* (Paris: Jean Du Puis, 1673), 211. Further references to this work will be found in parentheses in the text.

23. See Madeleine Alcover, *Poullain de la Barre: Une Aventure philosophique* (Paris: *Biblio* 17–1, *Papers on French 17th-Century Literature*, 1981), 14–15. On Poullain de la Barre, see also: Bernard Magné, "Le Féminisme de Poullain de la Barre, origine et signification" (Thesis, Faculté de Lettres, Toulouse, 1962); Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours* (Paris: des femmes, 1977), 157–67; Michel Delon, "Cartésianisme(s) et féminisme(s)," *Europe* 56 (October 1978): 77–82; and Paul Hoffmann, *La Femme dans la pensée des lumières* (Paris: Ophrys, 1977), 291–308.

of pleasure (agrément), Poullain envisions a dismantling of institutionalized androcentric discourse: "If Cercles were changed into Academies, the conversations would be more solid, pleasant, and loftier. And every woman can judge what satisfaction she would take in speaking about finer things by that which she sometimes feels in hearing others speak about them" (173–74).

In terms of his relation to the discourse of objectivity, Poullain is closer to Descartes than is Fontenelle.[24] Like Elisabeth's correspondent, Poullain rejects the language of galanterie, as he tells us in the preface to *De l'égalité des deux sexes* (On the Equality of the Sexes). He intends to speak "as a Philosopher" and views the two languages as incompatible: "It's impossible to illuminate and amuse the mind by the same route." In shunning the classical pairing of pleasure and instruction, Poullain avoided the trap into which Fontenelle later fell: the feminine, as a principle of pleasure in the *Entretiens*, is ultimately excluded from the discourse it is meant to embellish. Descartes's use of the discourse of objectivity was not without androcentrism. The philosopher who hoped that science would turn its practitioners into "masters and possessors of nature" (AT 6:62), a vision, as we have seen, that gave no small discomfort to his niece, was speaking with the voice of his gender.[25] Descartes may even have subscribed to a theory of female inferiority.[26] But his methodical doubt made possible a modification, if not a transformation of androcentricity.

It is therefore of capital importance that Poullain seizes on Cartesian doubt as a first principle in his feminist apologies. Like Descartes and Elisabeth, Poullain saw himself as the embattled spokesperson for unprejudiced reason. His militant feminism, as he announces in the preface to *De l'égalité des deux sexes*, begins with a rejection of custom and authority. Although his program is authentically democratic—a "science universelle" embracing both sexes and all classes—it is spearheaded by an enlightened vanguard. This inevitable elitism of the enlightened is reminiscent of both Fontenelle and Descartes. The Philosopher, however, speaks to the Marquise from his citadel of knowledge; between master and pupil there is a language barrier that is largely inoperative for Descartes and Elisabeth. Descartes's radical doubt opens on to a future of truth that is always under construction. Poullain would construct a feminist counterdiscourse based on his

24. On Poullain's relation to Descartes, see Hoffmann, *Femme*, 291–308.
25. See Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 188.
26. See Alcover, *Poullain de la Barre*, 71–73.

own doubt that androcentric discourse is true. His figure of the enlightened man refuses the master-pupil relationship that the Philosopher adopts with the Marquise. "I hate the word 'master,'" says one of Poullain's male characters in *De l'education des dames* (On the Education of Ladies) (1674).[27] Such a refusal is meant to exclude the possibility of male dominance.

In this connection it is significant that the spectator-subject all but disappears from Poullain's writings. The subtle and problematic fracture of the first person plural pronoun does not occur. Poullain is quite self-conscious in his polemical use of "nous." In *De l'égalité des deux sexes*, the pronoun designates either the men whom Poullain wishes to persuade that women are intellectually equal to "us" or else a genuinely inclusive human community: "In fact, all of us—men and women alike—have the same right to truth, since our minds are all equally capable of attaining it and since we're all struck in the same way by objects that make an impression on the body" (142). In *De l'education des dames*, Poullain sketches a gesture of reflexivity which unites male and female in an attempt to overcome the prejudices, chief among which is gender, that impede the exercise of human reason: "We are ourselves the book in which you must study [the knowledge of ourselves]: what we learn from it is not what happens elsewhere in faraway Provinces, but what happens in us a hundred times a day" (246). The character Eulalie learns the lesson of reflexive thought quite easily. Unlike Fontenelle's Marquise, she does not speak from the other side of a linguistic barrier masked by a deceptive first person plural pronoun. Agreeing with the epistemology of Stasimaque (represented as the author of *De l'égalité des deux sexes*), she says: "As you say, you have only to reflect on what we do in order to know it. And now I see that I need only pay attention in order to know, for example, doubt, resolution, hunger, thirst, pain, and pleasure. And this finally persuades me of the truth of what you prove in your book on Equality, that it isn't as hard to become a Philosopher as it is to become an Upholsterer" (*De l'education*, 240–41).

In urging such reflexivity on his addressee, Poullain takes responsibility for his subjectivity. Implicitly he, like everyone else, must undertake to examine the conditions of his reasoning. Poullain draws his spectacular image from a different perspective than does either Des-

27. [François Poullain de la Barre], *De l'education des dames pour la conduite de l'esprit dans les sciences et dans les moeurs. Entretiens* (Paris: Antoine Dezallier, 1679, 2d ed.; reprint, ed. Bernard Magné, Université de Toulouse Le Mirail, n.d.), 191.

cartes or Fontenelle. His subject, at once spectator and participant, is inside the theater of the world on a quest for an empirical truth based on self-knowledge:

> It's one thing to see men as they are, and another to view them only from the perspective of a Library. Experience has to complete what begins in good books. You gain much more solid knowledge when you see things on a large scale in the Theater of the world than you do when you see them on a small scale in writing. Oddities that you can observe in men's behavior . . . and people's habit of condemning what shocks them and approving what pleases them allow a well-disposed mind to form as important and enlightening reflections without leaving home as one would after traveling around the world and meditating on the diversity of temperaments, customs, opinions, and Religions of all its inhabitants. (*De l'education*, 315–16)

Although Poullain was not self-conscious in his use of the masculine universal "men," he wished to speak as both a man and a human. His "well-disposed mind" carries a nuance of elitism, but it also marks an educative horizon for everyone. It is only in the "theater of the world" that reflexivity can form the mind. In this theater, where androcentricity was on stage, to be both actor and audience was a precondition for changing the program.

Poullain wanted a discourse that would solve the puzzle of objectivity and the abstraction of the subject. Yet his polemic signals that he was already speaking within and against the discourse of objectivity. His desired transformation of cercle into academy would after all only further diffuse the discourse of the academy. Poullain nevertheless clung to a vision of universally self-conscious subjects whose discourse would abolish the barriers of gender and class. It is an open question whether in the 1670s his view represented even that of a significant minority. It has taken until our own day for him to gain some measure of recognition.[28] Fontenelle, by contrast, spoke *for* the dominant discourse in advertising the universality of so-called "clas-

28. Nevertheless, in the seventeenth century there were four reprints of *De l'égalité des deux sexes*, three of *De l'excellence des hommes*, and two of *De l'education des dames*. See Magné, "Féminisme," 356. Georges Ascoli, whose account of the successive editions of Poullain's works differs from Magné's, cites specific instances of Poullain's literary influence in the eighteenth century. See Georges Ascoli, "Essai sur l'histoire des idées féministes en France du XVIe siècle à la Révolution," *Revue de Synthèse Historique* 13, no. 2 (1906): 166–67.

sicism", an objective truth that would efface the conditions of its own construction: "Only truth persuades, even without the accompaniment of all its proofs."[29]

Descartes's correspondence with Elisabeth figures prominently in the list of recommended readings that Poullain appended to his *De l'education des dames* (309). But by the 1670s the Cartesian moment for women had waned. Descartes's appeal for women of the salons stemmed in part from the emancipatory possibilities of a methodical doubt calling for critical scrutiny of all received ideas, a scrutiny that could eventuate in female empowerment. The year 1666, however, closed off that route by reserving for men a scientific knowledge that was to serve the interests of the regime in the corridors of political power. Henceforth "objective" truth was determined by and for men within limits set by the state.

The "Real Marquises"

The identity of the Philosopher's student in the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* becomes an interesting historical question only when we put "Marquise(s)" in the plural.[30] The search for a "key" to the Marquise's identity may have been an amusing parlor game for the author's contemporaries, but to us her anonymity conceals a loss of individuality for the Cartesian woman who thrived in an atmosphere of contestation. Fontenelle's admission that "the ignorant" were his "real Marquises" suggests that the Marquise in her wider import was not gendered. Yet Fontenelle's choice of a feminine figure was quite deliberate. Whom did the emblematic Marquise figure in her readers' minds? Some answers may be gleaned from a comparison with related documents, from Louis de Lesclache's *Avantages que les femmes peuvent recevoir de la philosophie, et principalement de la morale* (Advantages That Women Can Gain from Philosophy, Chiefly Moral Philosophy) (1667) to Jérôme de Lalande's *Astronomie des dames* (Astronomy for Ladies) (1786). Fontenelle's *Entretiens* was so closely associated with Lalande's treatise that by the nineteenth century the two works were published together in one bound volume. (Lalande had produced an annotated edition of the *Entretiens*.) Although Lalande's

29. Fontenelle, *Entretiens*, 75.

30. Cf. Michel Delon, "La Marquise et le philosophe," *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, n.s. 182 (1981–82): 65. Delon introduces the possibility of considering the Marquise in the plural and thus of discussing social groups, but does not pursue the idea.

work originally appeared in the *Bibliothèque Universelle des Dames* (Universal Ladies' Library) (1785–97), the (feminine) gender of his addressee is almost irrelevant. As the "party of Philosophy" gained in prestige throughout Fontenelle's long lifetime and beyond, the "real Marquises" faded more and more into a seemingly gender-neutral crowd of "ignorant people."

The standard classification of the *Entretiens* as a work of popularization derives from seventeenth-century readers' perceptions that it was destined specifically for a female public. The *Mercure Galant*'s review, in the form of a letter to a lady, inaugurated this tradition. "Although it's about Philosophy," the reviewer says, it is "given such a gallant turn that the subject matter seems in no way barbarous." In this work of "disguised Philosophy," feminine readers will be able to follow the arguments "without difficulty" because "Physics is made accessible to all Ladies, without exception, even if they've never even heard of it."[31] The *Journal des Sçavans* took up the theme by observing that Fontenelle did not treat his subject "like a Scholastic." Instead, "he enlivens it very pleasantly; and he adapts his argument to the understanding of a Marquise whom he introduces into his work in order to let the Ladies know that it's for their sex that he has labored."[32] In the brief satirical dialogue that the irreverent Charles de Saint-Evremond composed on the publication of the *Entretiens*, an inveterate gambler complains that the ladies have deserted cards for astronomy.[33]

These comments suggest that, although the feminine public for philosophy was restricted, it was growing and was worth cultivating. By the time of the first edition of the *Entretiens*, the militant phase of Cartesianism was well under way. The alliance of women and Cartesians against "prejudice" brought together two besieged groups struggling for recognition. The Philosopher employs an imagery of militancy. He tells the Marquise that his stand on the habitability of the moon is shrewd strategy: "I take sides in such matters as one does in civil Wars, where the uncertainty of what may happen causes us to have dealings with the opponent and to treat our very Enemies with consideration" (47). As Cartesianism drew increasing interest in the salons, the antifeminist, anti-Modern camp began to bring out its guns for the "civil wars" that also became a battle for the minds of

31. *Mercure Galant* (January 1686): 202–3.

32. *Journal des Sçavans* (22 April 1686): 86.

33. [Charles de] Saint-Evremond, *Oeuvres meslees*, 2d ed. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1709), 3:101–5.

women. In Molière's *Femmes savantes* (Learned Ladies) (1672) as well as Boileau's (in)famous tenth satire on women (1694), the savante has an astronomical curiosity that implicitly associates her with Cartesian and "Modern" philosophy.

Cautionary literature masquerading as "philosophy for ladies" incorporated a stock caricature of the learned lady. The third entretien of the abbé de Gérard's *Philosophie des gens de cour* (Courtiers' Philosophy) (1680), for example, is titled "How Ladies should apply themselves to the Study of Philosophy." According to one commentator, Gérard was a possible source for Fontenelle,[34] and indeed a learned Marquise serves as a philosophical muse for one of Gérard's interlocutors. Nevertheless, this entretien introduces another learned lady, a witch who spends night after night peering at the moon through her rooftop telescope. Her intellectual baggage is diverse enough to contain geocentricity, the habitability of the moon, the philosopher's stone, astrology, and palmistry. She disdainfully leaves *la morale* to the priest. The lesson of the entretien is that the woman doesn't deserve the name of *philosophe*. What she studies—"Phisique," or natural philosophy—turns out to be the wrong kind of philosophy for women. It is moral philosophy to which they should devote themselves. Gérard proceeds in the fifth and sixth entretiens to elaborate a natural philosophy that neutralizes the more theologically ominous aspects of Cartesianism. His conclusion is a moralistic revision of the intellectual double standard: natural philosophy is all right in its place, but the primary occupation of male and female "philosophes" alike should be moral and political philosophy.

Earlier in the century, Louis de Lesclache had taken a very similar line. Gérard's witch could have been lifted straight from Lesclache's *Avantages que les femmes peuvent recevoir de la philosophie*. The famous lecturer's treatise features a woman who frequents freethinking salons. Like Gérard's witch, she is "mad" for natural philosophy, including astronomy, astrology, palmistry, and related pursuits. Moral philosophy is the only kind that counts for Lesclache, however. Although he prescribes it for everyone, he reserves his strongest recommendations for women. Moral philosophy alone will school them in piety, domestic arts, and maternal virtues. Writing at a time when, thanks to the general accessibility of Cartesian philosophy, women in significant numbers were beginning to venture into a previously mas-

34. See Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. Robert Shackleton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 7–8.

culine intellectual arena, Lesclache broadcast a message that did not fall on deaf ears. For the likes of Gérard and Lesclache, the woman "philosophe" was a threat to both femininity and theology.

In substituting a female protagonist for the male speakers of Gérard's entretiens, Fontenelle seemingly counters this threat with a defense of both women and the "party of Moderns." At least one recent critic has characterized the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* as feminist.[35] Seventeenth-century critics hastened to reassure their readers that although Fontenelle admitted a woman to the precincts of natural philosophy, he "moralized" this philosophy into respectability. The *Mercure Galant* let it be known that Fontenelle's "Phisique" was "supported by all the moral reflections that the subject can inspire."[36] Another reviewer palliated similar fears: "Although this book seems to treat questions of Physics, and even in a manner suited to the intelligence of Ladies, it is nevertheless filled with moral lessons."[37] Moreover, Fontenelle seems to ironize the genre of "philosophy for ladies." In his preface he says that he intends his Marquise to encourage the ladies by paving the way for a philosophy without tears. It is as if the battle lines were drawn. To an allegation of Gérard's that modern philosophy is too mathematical and too obscure, Fontenelle replies with a philosophy as easy as *La Princesse de Clèves*. He discards Gérard's witch and rehabilitates his wise Marquise.

The anti-Cartesian, antifeminist backlash visible in the cautionary literature of philosophy for ladies was premised on the notion that the new learning was immoral; hence the double argument that women should stick to moral philosophy and that anyway the only true philosophy was moral. To convert women (and their concerned husbands or fathers) to the party of philosophy, then, Fontenelle needed to moralize it. But why try to convert the women anyway?

35. See Delon, "La Marquise," 66. Although in her introduction to a recent English translation of the *Entretiens*, Nina Rattner Gelbart does not characterize the *Entretiens* as feminist, she does paint Fontenelle as a champion of women's intellectual rights. Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*, trans. H. A. Hargreaves, Introduction by Nina Rattner Gelbart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), xxvi-xxviii. Patricia Phillips also sees Fontenelle as a defender of women. See Patricia Phillips, *The Scientific Lady: A Social History of Women's Scientific Interests, 1520–1918* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 85–89. Albistur and Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme*, 168–69, by contrast, maintain that the *Entretiens* is not a feminist work.

36. *Mercure Galant* (January 1686): 203.

37. *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique* (Jean LeClerc) (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1968; facs. of 1689 ed.), 3:602.

"Philosophy without tears" was not an enterprise of intellectual noblesse oblige on the part of an expert catering to the demands of a larger public. Recent criticism has rightly detected a distinct note of elitism on Fontenelle's part.[38] The future secretary of the Académie des Sciences was engaged in what amounted to a serious power struggle. The new philosophy that was institutionalized by the state in 1666 was closely allied to the emerging sociopolitical regime. Technological innovations were essential to Colbert's mercantilism and to France's nascent capitalism; the academicians' pragmatic values were those of an embryonic bourgeoisie. But in 1686 Fontenelle's party still had a long way to go to capture the political recognition and prestige that would accompany its ultimate rise to power in the next century.

The tone of militancy in the *Entretiens* arises from a felt urgency to win over those in power to a recognition of the importance of the party that the author undertook to represent. In 1699 Fontenelle spelled out its program more straightforwardly in his preface to the *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences*. Here, where his public was overwhelmingly male, Fontenelle argued not from pleasure (agrément) and morality, as he had done in the *Entretiens*, but from utility. As Maurice Roelens has remarked, Fontenelle's insistence on the utility of science in his preface reveals the close connection between the work of the Académie and economic expansion.[39] The usefulness of science to the state becomes an argument for the extension of indoctrination in its virtues. The secretary of the Académie makes it quite clear that it is not necessarily scientific knowledge itself that he wants to disseminate but rather "a taste for Science [*Sciences*]."[40] Much of the preface can be read as a defensive reply to the questions that Fontenelle puts in the mouth of an unspecified devil's advocate: "But of what use is it to spread the taste for Mathematics and Physics? Of what utility are the Academy's occupations?" (viii). In response, the author enumerates the practical benefits of the various sciences: astronomy's use in navigation, anatomy's in surgery, geometry's in the military arts, and so forth.

38. See Steven F. Rendall, "Fontenelle and His Public," *MLN* 86 (May 1971): 496–508. See also Roland Mortier, "Fontenelle entre l'optimisme scientifique et le pessimisme anthropologique," in *Fontenelle*, ed. Niderst, 681–82.

39. [Bernard Le Bovier de] Fontenelle, *Textes choisis*, ed. Maurice Roelens (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1966), 263.

40. *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences* (1699), 2d ed. (Amsterdam: Pierre Mortier, 1734), viii. Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text.

Fontenelle tells us that the *Histoire de l'Académie*, less specialized and detailed than the Academy's *Mémoires*, was designed precisely to let the outside world know what was going on within the specialized confines of the Academy. The *Histoire* is aimed at "those who have only a smattering of Mathematics and Physics" (vi). Thus the Academy's two publications define two separate publics: the "profound Thinkers" (Savans profonds) and those who aren't (vii). The function of the *Histoire* is to *display* the Academy's accomplishments to the second group. Without such a publication, knowledge in the hands of a "small group of people" would be *invisible*, especially if this group belongs to what we might call low-profile professions (des Professions peu éclatantes) (ix). Fontenelle took it for granted that scientific knowledge must remain the property of the specialists. His goal was to gain prestige for the new philosophical party. Both the *Entretiens* and the *Histoire* were to serve as publicity, literally as advertising display, for a special interest group smart enough to know that its time had come.

The image of the spectator in both the *Entretiens* and the preface organizes a public that will "buy" the new philosophy. It is no wonder that Fontenelle, who in another one of his many careers was a librettist, made the Marquise a spectator of his "opera" in the *Entretiens*. The opera is of course not simply a metaphor for "nature." The Philosopher's claim to the Marquise, "I have only to draw the curtain and to show you the World" (21), is disingenuous, to say the least. The "world," or nature, is mediated by Fontenelle's largely Cartesian vision. The only illustration of a 1686 edition of the *Entretiens* is a stage curtain embroidered with a Copernican cosmos. Read as spectacle, Fontenelle's conversations seem less like astronomy lessons than like an electronics salesman's pitch to a prospective customer. In the preface to the *Histoire*, the secretary tells us that the situation of the Academy is like an artisan's shop window filled with wonderful inventions that the casual passerby might miss. "There is a lack of Spectators for very useful and ingeniously conceived Instruments and Practices," he says (xi).

Now in this context the *Entretiens* would have a far more serious purpose than is generally assumed.[41] Underneath the "good humor" and "frivolity," which for Alain Niderst characterize the work, is a bid for public support of the scientific interest group. That the public is

41. See, for example, Alain Niderst, *Fontenelle à la recherche de lui-même, 1657–1702* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), 264–83, esp. 283.

incarnated in a marquise is no accident. As a titled lady she calls to mind the Cartesian salonnières. She, just as much as the mysterious addressee of her mentor's initial letter to Monsieur L——, represents a beau monde that was still a very influential intellectual force.[42] Socially, the Marquise is a powerful figure to contend with; her sex, however, makes her an inferior. Thus she is the perfect target for Fontenelle's propaganda. As a marquise, she can lend her prestige to the new enterprise. As a woman, however, she will remain safely on the outside of scientific practice and its potential power. This convenient discrepancy between gender and social rank is the reason that Fontenelle makes her a spectator of a scene in which she, unlike the members of the Académie des Sciences, will never attempt to intervene.

There is no evidence from the text of the *Entretiens* that Monsieur L—— belongs to a different social or intellectual milieu from that of the Marquise, as Jean-Pierre Beaujot and Marie-Françoise Mortureux have argued. They contend that Fontenelle's project in the *Entretiens* is an extension of the image of translation that the author uses in the preface. In this reading, the *Entretiens* is an attempt to mediate between the world of the savants, represented by Monsieur L——, and that of high society, the monde represented by the Marquise, and to provide each faction with an interpetation or "translation" of the other.[43] But Monsieur L—— is not a savant; he's a "philosophe," that is, an urbane man "of quality" who was expecting to hear all about the parties at the château but will be perfectly satisfied with an impromptu philosophy lesson instead. The distinction is important, because when it is recognized that Monsieur L—— is not a virtuoso, that he possesses no expertise inaccessible to the Marquise, all that remains to differentiate the two addressees is gender. The Marquise needs to be won over as Monsieur L—— evidently already has been

42. Cf. Michel Delon, "La Marquise et le philosophe," 65. Delon sees the Marquise as belonging to the "milieu des privilégiés sans incarner directement le pouvoir d'ancien régime" (milieu of the privileged without directly incarnating the power of the Old Regime) and as participating in the "monde des privilèges, mais non à celui de la spécialité" (world of privileges, but not in that of specialization).

43. Jean-Pierre Beaujot and Marie-Françoise Mortureux, "Genèse et fonctionnement du discours: les 'Pensées diverses sur la comète' de Bayle et les 'Entretiens sur la pluralité des Mondes,' de Fontenelle," *Langue Française* 15 (September 1972): 56–78. Marie-Françoise Mortureux, in her study *Formation et fonctionnement*, develops the thesis that Fontenelle was the learned "interpreter" of scientific thought to a lay public. Volker Kapp makes a similar argument in connection with Fontenelle's *Eloges académiques*. See Volker Kapp, "Les Qualités du scientifique et le prestige social des sciences dans les Eloges académiques de Fontenelle," in *Fontenelle*, ed. Niderst, 441–42.

because as a lady she can attract a powerful coterie in her wake. As a marquise, she is taken seriously enough by Fontenelle to be the emblem of the "ignorant people" he wishes to convert; as a woman, she prefigures the larger public who would admire the wares of philosophy while remaining safely outside its workshops. Her double function in turn prefigures the eighteenth-century version of the party of philosophy, which was composed of a large lay group of sympathizers and a small inner circle of practitioners.

The completion of this evolution signals the passage from the militant phase of the rational discourse that Fontenelle's *Entretiens* was designed to promote to its hegemonic phase. Although we may think of the eighteenth-century philosophes as militants, a good part of their program was already accomplished by the time of their major writings. The philosophy and technology that were the natural outgrowth of the seventeenth-century academies had been revealed as not incompatible with mercantilism and colonial expansion. Many of the Counter-Reformation's prejudices that the Marquise had learned to discard had been badly shaken.

The language of Fontenelle's preface to another volume (1733) of the *Histoire de l'Académie* bespeaks the new self-confidence of the discourse he had championed in the preface of 1699. By 1733 it seems that the revolution in intellectual consciousness urged by the polemics of the earlier preface was complete. The first preface is written in a present tense that is future- oriented; it dilates on the utility of the sciences, showing that they will eventually be recognized for what they're worth. The present tense journalistically denotes what is current; it is writing "to the moment" designed to inform the public of the very latest developments in intellectual life. The preface of 1733, by contrast, is written in a past tense that retrospectively accounts for what has already occurred. So the synchronic tension between pleasure and utility that informs the *Entretiens* is resolved diachronically in the later preface. Fontenelle tells us in the very first paragraph that the Renaissance began with oratory, poetry, painting, and architecture—with what, in short, can be classified as pleasure. Only later did mathematics and natural philosophy—what Fontenelle calls the "more profound branches of learning"—follow suit. So, as he says, "pleasure, which nearly always has an advantage over solidity, had at that time the advantage of preceding it."[44]

The Marquise of Fontenelle's *Entretiens* fits nicely into his general program to promote the "party of philosophy." By making her a

44. Fontenelle, *Oeuvres*, 8 vols. (Paris: J. F. Bastien, 1790–92), 6:1.

figure both of pleasure and of the powerful monde of the salons whose support he was seeking, Fontenelle subtly revises the feminine image in the "philosophies for ladies." The beautiful and gracious Marquise is hardly a witch. As one of the "ignorant," she hasn't meddled in the male preserve of natural philosophy. Not only has she eschewed the black arts, she seems unencumbered by formal instruction. From the depths of her salon-like garden she speaks as a worldly-wise but unschooled woman. With the Philosopher's help, she will clear her mind of the prejudices that make her a committed earthling for whom Fontenelle's cosmic vision raises the spectre of a war of the worlds between earth and moon (34).

At the end of the first edition of 1686, Fontenelle leaves his Marquise "learned," by which he means that he has made her mind into a blank slate on which his system can be written. To her exclamation "I'm learned!" he replies that she still has the option to "believe nothing of what I've told you" (156). In other words, without committing her to any intellectual position, he has made her infinitely teachable. As we have seen, by the second edition of 1687, Fontenelle withdrew from the Marquise even this minimal right of participation in the new philosophy by returning her to her separate sphere of pleasure at the end of the sixth evening.[45] By 1687, then, the Marquise has been conquered. Her prejudices eradicated, she has been converted into a permanent spectator of masculine knowledge. Women as "ignorant," it would seem, were destined to remain so.

Jérôme de Lalande's *Astronomie des dames* confirms this impression. In his preface, Lalande informs us that he will "totally forget" learned scholars and cater only to ladies. His project, like that of the *Bibliothèque Universelle des Dames* in which his work first appeared, was to educate, not to convert. As in Fontenelle, women represent, but do not solely constitute, the lay public to be educated. Both Lalande himself and the *Avant-propos* to the *Bibliothèque* make it clear that this project is addressed also to men. The volumes were elegantly presented in the traditionally small, conveniently portable format preferred by people of good society.[46] We may infer, however, that the collection's public extended to a broader and more bourgeois group of élites than did the first edition of Fontenelle's *Entretiens*. The tone is distinctly bourgeois. In the Avant-propos to the *Bibliothèque*, we are

45. Cf. Delon, "La Marquise," 75. Delon doesn't discuss the implications of the sixth "soir" for female education.

46. On the *Bibliothèque*, see Vivienne Mylne, "The *Bibliothèque Universelle des Dames* (1785–97)," in *Women and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. W. H. Barber et al. (London: Athlone, 1979), 123–36.

told that the editors have excised anything that could "cause modesty to start, or too strongly inflame the imagination" and that even the fussiest mother could safely allow her daughter to read it.[47] The publishers, then, targeted as its public members of the bourgeoisie or nobility of both sexes.

But if the project was truly one of education and not just of advertising display, why not assume that the "ladies" who read Lalande and the other volumes could eventually *leave* the class of the "ignorant?" The editors don't seem to have decided just how much education the "ignorant" should have. The general aim seems to have been to form cultivated persons capable of holding their own in polite conversation. In the age of the philosophes, astronomy was just one component in a general culture spanning an encyclopedic range of subjects. The type of education offered by the *Bibliothèque* ensured that its public would get a sufficient smattering of this culture to remain outside the circle of "learned scholars" and yet to be able to appreciate their work.

Lalande takes for granted the establishment of a knowledge to which Fontenelle in 1686 was trying to win adherents. In the preface to the *Astronomie des dames*, he remarks, "the utility of Astronomy is sufficiently well known for me not to have to emphasize it."[48] His statement recalls Fontenelle's message of 1733 that a scientific renaissance had already occurred. With this message in mind, Lalande in his "Préface historique" rapidly recapitulates the history of astronomy since classical antiquity. It is because he conceives his task to be education rather than publicity or conversion that he feels a necessity to update Fontenelle's *Entretiens* not only in astronomical facts but also in style. Because he no longer needs a marquise to lend prestige to his enterprise, Lalande speaks *to* the ladies rather than *with* them. If he found the *Entretiens* "too superficial," as he says (3), it was undoubtedly because the conversations recalled the wit of the preceding century's salons. His own project is a *mission civilisatrice* to bring heliocentrism to the masses. The message he brings them is that enlightenment is here to stay whether they like it or not, so they need to clear the geocentric dust from their eyes.

The feminine public for the *Astronomie des dames*, then, can no longer be adequately represented by a marquise. Not only is it a socially

47. Avant-propos, *Bibliothèque Universelle des Dames*, 154 vols. (Paris: Bidault, 1785–1806) 1:2.

48. Jérôme de Lalande, *Astronomie des dames*, 3d ed. (Paris: Bidault, 1806), 8. Further references to this edition will be placed in parentheses in the text.

broader, more diffuse group; it no longer carries the power or prestige of the seventeenth-century salon women. In the eighteenth century, when the masculine café began to rival the feminine salon, the salon woman began to play second fiddle to her male guests.[49] The public space of the salon as a meeting place of the élite gradually gave way to its function as a private corridor of power for certain ambitious men. Fontenelle as the "star" of Madame de Lambert's salon in the early decades of the eighteenth century was himself a witness to the ulterior development of an institution that in its origins had centered on the feminine presence of an "Arthénice" or a "Sapho."[50] So it is not surprising that women seem to have little identity of their own in the *Astronomie des dames*. Although Lalande does devote several pages of his preface to a summary of women's accomplishments in astronomy, he soon forgets about the ladies of his title. Here and there, it is true, he nods in their direction, but in general the addressee of this work, like that of the general collection of the *Bibliothèque des Dames*, is ungendered. "Ladies" melt into the broad base of public support for the party of philosophy that Lalande knew was at least virtually out there. The "education of women" *as women* is not a serious issue for Lalande. One wonders whether or not it was for the general editors of the *Bibliothèque*.

Of course Fontenelle wasn't interested in giving his Marquise a serious education either. He did want and need, however, to convert her to his party and to benefit from her prestige. From the *Entretiens* to the *Astronomie des dames*, the "real marquises"—women with an aspiration to learning and a distinct social identity—seem to disappear. Their efforts to educate themselves in the seventeenth century had met with much resistance, but they had undeniably won a certain power. By the late eighteenth century, they had made no significant institutional gains in education. Even the home educational project of the *Bibliothèque Universelle des Dames* was not addressed specifically to

49. On the disappearance of the salon as public space, see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). See also Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Women and the Enlightenment," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, 2d ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 258. For a different view of the eighteenth-century salons, see Dena Goodman, "Seriousness of Purpose: Salonnières, Philosophes, and the Shaping of the Eighteenth-Century Salon," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 15 (1988): 111–18.

50. Cf. Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 30–32. Schiebinger does not discuss the social evolution of the salon from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century.

them. The feminocentric salon was on the decline. Looking back over this century of the history of the "real marquises," we may want to ask, along with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, did women have an Enlightenment?[51]

A Voyage into Feminine Space

Shortly after Fontenelle's death there appeared a seven-volume work titled *Voyages de milord Céton dans les sept planettes, ou le nouveau mentor, traduits par Madame de R. R.* (Lord Céton's Voyages to the Seven Planets, or the New Mentor, translated by Madame de R. R.) (1765–66). Marie Anne de Roumier Robert was the author, not the translator, of these voyages. Contemporaries such as Joseph de La Porte saw them as a reworking of Fontenelle's *Entretiens*.[52] Some two decades later, this claim was disputed by Charles Garnier, the editor of a large collection of fantastic voyages which included the *Voyages de milord Céton* and another of Robert's novels.[53] There is no doubt that Robert owed a debt to Fontenelle. During her early childhood her precocious talents had attracted the academician's attention when he came to dine at her father's house. It is probable that Robert's Cartesianism was filtered through her father's friend. Echoes of the *Entretiens* abound in her novel. In the few passages dealing with astronomy, Robert pilfers freely from her predecessor.[54] In masking the *Voyages* as translations, a commonplace cover for fiction, Robert may have been alluding to the opening metaphor of the *Entretiens*.[55] Moreover, Fontenelle puts in a stunning cameo appearance in her *Voyages*

51. Fox-Genovese, "Women and the Enlightenment," 254. Her question echoes the title of another essay in the collection *Becoming Visible*: Joan Kelly-Gadol's, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" 175–201.

52. [Joseph de La Porte, aidé par (with the help of) J. F. de La Croix], *Histoire littéraire des femmes françoises* (Paris: Lacombe, 1769), 5:94.

53. [Charles Georges Thomas Garnier, ed.], *Voyages imaginaires, songes, visions, et romans cabalistiques*, 39 vols. (Amsterdam and Paris: Rue et Hôtel Serpente, 1787–89), 17:v.

54. See, for example, the passage on the origins of astronomy in [Marie Anne de Roumier Robert], *Voyages de milord Céton dans les sept planettes, ou le nouveau mentor, traduits par Madame de R. R.*, 7 vols. (The Hague and Paris: Chez Tous les Libraires Qui Débitent les Nouveautés, 1765–66), 5:19–20, and compare Fontenelle's *Entretiens* (ed. Calame), 21–22. Further references to Robert's novel, unless otherwise indicated, will be to this edition.

55. The Chevalier de Béthune, who was also inspired by Fontenelle, presents his interplanetary voyage as a translation. Béthune, *Relation du monde de Mercure*, 2 vols. in 1 (Geneva: Barillot et Fils, 1750).

when he is met with a grand reception at the "Philosophers' Palace" on the sun (5:122–23). It is noteworthy that Robert's first readers perceived the links with Fontenelle. A reading of the *Voyages de milord Céton* in the wake of the *Entretiens* will let us compare Robert's use of Enlightenment discourse and the Cartesian tradition with that of the man who is paid such homage in her novel.[56]

Very little is known about the life of Marie Anne de Roumier Robert (1705–71). She thought of herself as bourgeois, although Laporte hints that her father may have been a nobleman who entered commerce only as a last resource. Her maternal grandfather was a lawyer. Her early education was interrupted by the John Law fiasco, which ruined her parents financially and may even have precipitated their deaths. A relative placed her in a convent and subsequently married her to Monsieur Robert, a lawyer of some prominence. She was apparently sickly and reclusive and wrote her novels in solitude.[57] Garnier informs us that she died in Paris.[58] Her other novels (to be discussed in the next chapter) include *La Paysanne philosophe* (The Peasant-Girl Philosophe) (1761–62), *La Voix de la nature* (The Voice of Nature) (1763), *Les Ondins* (The Undines) (1768), and *Nicole de Beauvais* (1767).

Robert's fiction met with what appears to be a gendered critical reception. The *Correspondance Littéraire*, edited by Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, and other philosophes, contained devastating notices. The *Voyages de milord Céton* were dismissed as a "rhapsody," one of many poor imitations of Swift.[59] *La Paysanne philosophe* was said to number among "bad novels." "No one reads such platitudes," the editors commented (4:491, December 1761). The reader was advised to chuck *La Voix de la nature* into the fire (5:295, May 1763), and *Nicole de Beauvais* was shrugged off as a pile of useless garbage probably written by an obscure provincial or foreigner (7:184, December 1766). In the judgment of Fréron's *Année Littéraire*, *Les Ondins* was just another banal fairy tale. The journal praised the religious and moral values in both *La Paysanne philosophe* and *La Voix de la nature*, but it called the

56. Léon Abensour is struck by how visibly the *Voyages* are marked by the intellectual currents of the time. Léon Abensour, *La Femme et le féminisme avant la Révolution* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1923), 309.

57. On Robert, see La Porte, *Histoire littéraire*, 5:79–80. In her preface to the *Voyages* (vii), Robert refers to herself as a "bourgeoise."

58. Garnier, *Voyages imaginaries*, 17:ix.

59. Grimm, Diderot et al., *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique, et critique*, ed. Maurice Tourneux, 16 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1877–82), 6:185–86 (January 1765).

latter novel a "bagatelle" and criticized the style of both novels. Of the *Paysanne philosophe*, it said: "Perhaps severe Critics will blame the hackneyed romance [romanesque] of its poorly connected episodes and its familiar and often low style, but it must be remembered that it was written by a woman." Fréron was somewhat kinder to *Nicole de Beauvais*, but still no more than lukewarm in his comments.[60] On the other hand, the reviews in the *Journal des Dames* were favorable.[61] Despite the mixed reception, the novels achieved a small measure of success. *La Voix de la nature* went through six editions from 1763 to 1779; a second edition of *Nicole de Beauvais* appeared in 1768,[62] and Charles Garnier reprinted both *Les Ondins* and the *Voyages de milord Céton* in his *Voyages imaginaires*.

Whereas Fontenelle's *Entretiens* is a series of astronomy lessons destined to take the Marquise behind the scenes of the cosmic opera, the *Voyages* is more like a Bildungsroman. Céton and his sister Monime, refugees from Cromwell's "tyranny," meet up with a genie, Zachiel (the mentor of the title), who takes them on an interplanetary voyage through the seven "planets" of our solar system.[63] Each of the seven volumes of the novel corresponds to a planet. It is interesting that although Céton is the narrator of these voyages and it is he who figures in the title, the central character of the story is Monime. She is

60. On *Les Ondins*, see *L'Année Littéraire* (1768), 3:285–87; on *Nicole de Beauvais*, (1766), 8:338–50; for *La Voix de la nature*, (1763), 4:244–70, esp. 270; and for *La Paysanne philosophe*, (1761), 8:201–13, esp. 211–13.

61. Nina Rattner Gelbart, *Feminine and Opposition Journalism in Old Regime France: Le Journal des Dames* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 145. The extremely rare copies of the issues in which the reviews appeared were unavailable for inspection in Paris at the time of this writing.

62. See Angus Martin, Vivienne G. Mylne, and Richard Frautschi, *Bibliographie du genre romanesque français, 1751–1800* (London: Mansell, 1977). Philip Gove also mentions a Portuguese translation of *La Voix de la nature* of 1819. See Philip Babcock Gove, *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction: A History of Its Criticism and a Guide for Its Study* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 352.

63. Like Fontenelle, Robert counts the sun as a planet. Mortureux, *Formation et fonctionnement*, 120, points out that according to Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel*, the sun was one of the seven planets. Was Robert's use of a genie, or demon, a response to Fontenelle's debunking of such spirits in his *Histoire des oracles*? A philosophical voyage nearly contemporaneous with Robert's includes an explicit defense of the fictional use of genies. See Listonai [Daniel Jost de Villeneuve, pseud.], *Le Voyageur philosophe dans un pais inconnu aux habitants de la terre*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Aux dépens de l'éditeur, 1761), 1:3–5. Listonai's genie is a Rosicrucian, and the voyage is presented as a kind of initiation into the society's mysteries. Another possible source for Robert's novel, according to Marjorie Nicolson, is Athanasius Kircher's *Itinerarium Exstaticum* (1656), which features an angel, Cosmiel, who acts as a guide to the interstellar traveler Theodidactus. See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Voyages to the Moon* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 57–58. My thanks to Judith Schaneman for this reference.

the one, it turns out, who stands to benefit the most from the educational value of the trip. Loosely constructed in the style of the old multivolume romances of the seventeenth century, the *Voyages* frames interpolated stories set on the various planets by the larger story of Céton and Monime. Intimations of Céton's incestuous love for his sister that recur throughout the novel are finally explained by the revelation that Monime is in fact his cousin, a princess of Georgia, who can now return to claim her rightful place on the throne. What the voyages have taught her is how to be a good ruler. The *Voyages*, in other words, is a "mirror of princesses."

The move from astronomy lesson to mirror of princesses describes a shift in emphasis from science to morality. Robert, like Saint-Chamond and like the seventeenth-century cartésiennes, placed her highest value on moral philosophy. The *Voyages* includes astronomy lessons, but the pedagogic emphasis is on customs and morals. The reviewer for Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* saw the *Voyages* as an allegorical commentary on Parisian life (6:185, January 1765). Fontenelle's armchair travels to other planets are driven by a kind of climatic determinism: Venus's proximity to the sun is responsible for the imagined inhabitants' amorous temperament; the mournful, flegmatic Saturnians live on a planet whose great distance from the sun deprives them of warmth and light. These "scientific" musings on possible conditions of life on other planets disappear in Robert's work. Despite some other-worldly descriptions worthy of early modern science fiction, each of her planets metaphorizes an earthly trait: the lunarians are lunatics, Venus is the home of love, and so forth. The voyagers thus come away with an enhanced understanding of their own planet, or, more properly, their own country. It is the Marquise's earthbound perspective that triumphs here, for the moral and physical destination of the travelers is always home. In another sense, however, the *Voyages* plays out both the Marquise's dream of interstellar travel and the Philosopher's dream of viewing oneself from the perspective of outer space.

With the shift from science to morality comes a shift in the status of the female pupil. Monime is not to Zachiel as the Marquise is to the Philosopher. The Marquise, ultimately denied admission to the party of philosophy, is hardly given the wherewithal to qualify for candidacy. Monime's journey, by contrast, is meant to groom her for political rule. Yet in fact, by birth she already *is* a ruler, who will learn the art of good rule from Zachiel's lessons. As the story progresses, however, we are more and more impressed by her native moral supe-

riority and by how often others seem to learn from her. She is subject and agent of knowledge in a way that the Marquise could never be. La Porte comments on the improbability of the story: the mentor of Fénelon's Télémaque took him on an entirely believable, because standard, gentleman's journey. Monime's trip, La Porte says, could hardly serve as an example to readers because "the travels of young ladies are ordinarily limited to the convent."[64] Her mentor, like that of the Marquise, is male, but because he is superhuman, his superiority is not totally figured by his gender. As a divine emissary, he reminds readers that the monarch is ruled by divinity. On earth, it is Monime who rules.

Zachiel does not invite Monime and Céton to be "spectator-subjects" of the worlds that they visit. He does not grant them immunity from the foibles of those they observe, an immunity that Fontenelle's Philosopher seemed to enjoy. Nor does he exclude them from an active role in the construction of knowledge, as the Philosopher did the Marquise. There is no barrier between Zachiel's "spectacle" and the public, between object and subject of knowledge: "The plan that I've formed to perfect both of you obliges me to commit you to visiting other planets. The universe belongs to all men, and you're made to enjoy the spectacle that it presents to your view. Thus curiosity should inspire you with a kind of interest *which links you to the objects that animate it*, in order to make you spectators of everything that happens" (emphasis added).[65] Implicit in Zachiel's plan is a choice: his wards can either enjoy the spectacle of the world by being attentive to it, or they can ignore it. The Philosopher of the *Entretiens* offered a different choice: the Marquise could rest content with her very superficial knowledge of nature's "curtain," or she could venture behind the scenes with her guide. Robert's spectators are distinguished from Fontenelle's by the interest that Zachiel recommends to them. This interest implies both the curiosity that sparks it and a vested interest. The viewer is also an interested player; what happens in the world is of vital importance to everyone. The *Voyages* enacts this linkage, for Monime and Céton enter into plots generated by each place that they visit and form sentimental ties to the characters. The interested connection of observer to observed in the spectacle of the universe recalls the contestation of Cartesian objectivity by Princess

64. La Porte, *Histoire littéraire*, 5:95.

65. Robert, *Voyages*, 3:280–81. Further references to this edition will be placed in parentheses in the text.

Elisabeth and Catherine Descartes. Robert's ideal mode of knowing, like Evelyn Fox Keller's "dynamic objectivity," is not disinterested and value-neutral, but is positioned in relation to the consciousness of the thinking subject. For the enlightened elite, the advance guard of the party of philosophers who must convert and initiate a lay public, Robert substitutes a world that "belongs to all men." This knowledge is accessible because it is relational; we are all, she seems to say, implicated in what happens in our world.

Nevertheless, Robert does not construct a counter discourse to that of the philosophes. Instead, she inscribes her gender in the Enlightenment discourse of her text, contradicting and destabilizing the discourse without subverting or overturning it. Enlightenment discourse of course has its own contradictions. It claims that the universe of knowledge is open to "all men," while reserving its pursuit and dissemination to a few. It advocates liberty while endorsing a monarchy that enslaves. But such internal contradictions are concealed by the banner of reform which would wave away abuses of the political system. Robert's unease with this discourse stems from the question that forms her subtext: does the world belong to all women too?

This question first appears in the "Editor's Preface," the author's bid for approval as both a woman and a bourgeoise.[66] A series of visions serves as a reply to her rhetorical questioning of her legitimacy as a writer. A genie in the guise of a salamander emerges from her flaming hearth and delivers the classical precept: "instruct and please."[67] Next there appears a scroll of paper containing a story in a hand not unlike her own. This variant of the "discovered manuscript" topos mystifies the writer's gender. Calling herself a "female editor," the author states that she has "no ambition other than that of pleasing you" (1:vii-xxiii). Is it because she's a mere woman, demoted to the role of editor, that the instructive half of the genie's formula is dropped? Implicit in this abdication of authorship is an abdication of gender and class: authorship is reserved for aristocratic men, tainted neither by bourgeois commercialism nor by the inferior feminine intellect. Yet it is not to a man but to a genie that the author ultimately

66. The rhetorical strategies employed by women to gain approval for their writing changed little from the Renaissance. For a perceptive discussion of these strategies in women's prefaces of the Renaissance, see Anne R. Larsen, "'Un honneste passetems': Strategies of Legitimation in French Renaissance Women's Prefaces," *L'Esprit Créateur* 30 (Winter 1990): 11–22.

67. The supernatural salamander is ubiquitous in Béthune's *Relation*.

defers, as if to suggest that divine inspiration alone should take the credit for her work. "Translator" may defer to "author," but the author of the *Voyages* defers only to the heaven-sent spark of genius.

The author-editor's persona is doubled in Monime. Monime, too, is led by a genie into male territory—that of political rule. Like the author-editor's accession to authority, her accession to power involves an abdication of gender which is never absolute. The dénouement of the *Voyages*, in which on the heroine's return to her native land she becomes a warrior queen, seems magically to fulfill her transsexual longings. At the end of the first volume, when Zachiel tells her about a necromancer's elixir for changing sex, she says, "Of all his secrets, that's the one I'd most like to have in my power." She extracts a promise from the genie to get her a phial of it when they return to earth (1:298–300).

Episodes of transvestism in the novel are so many stages on the way to Monime's final assumption of power. Not only does her rule defy the Salic law; it reverses the French tradition of male monarchs and female regents. When at the end of the novel Monime goes off to lead her troops into battle with the sultan's army, she leaves as her regent Céton's long-lost father. This last stage of her journey recalls the first, when as a refugee from Cromwell's England she disguised herself as a boy (1:20). On the planet Mars, cross-dressing enacts Monime's Amazonian fantasy. The heroine's initial reaction to the warlike planet is one of fear and aversion. But she seems to overcome these feelings as she jokingly remarks that warriors who spend too much time around women run the risk of becoming effeminate. Without any transition she begs Zachiel to let her dress in a soldier's uniform: "If you absolutely force me to spend a long time on this planet, I want to dress as a man [me travestir]; I tell you that I will put on a uniform, I will buy a regiment, and before you know it, I'll be a colonel" (4:5–7). Zachiel adamantly refuses, as if waiting to grant her wish only in the "reality" of earth. However, she meets with an example in the character Marsine, who is forced to flee her country when a tyrant overthrows her father's rule. Marsine disguises herself as a soldier in the army of a prince whom she eventually weds.

These survivals of the early seventeenth century, the heroic age of the *femme forte*, have a Cinderella-like quality that bespeaks the degree to which Robert's world did not belong to all women.[68] The author

68. On the femme forte, a recurrent literary figure in the seventeenth century, see Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature, 1610–1652* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 64–79. Maclean notes, 119, that the femme forte was a creation mainly of male writers.

disguised as editor projects her desire for feminine authority onto a series of "travestied" female characters. Male warriors lose authority when they are feminized, as Monime remarks. Women gain it when they cross-dress as soldiers. Mars is reincarnated in Marsine, Robert's goddess of war and the central character of the planet Mars. Moreover, we are introduced to Marsine in a quasi-comic moment of mistaken identity when Céton finds Monime in the arms of the Martian, who is playing her masculine role of "Chevalier." In this scene, with its echoes of such pastoral romances as Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*, Monime's Amazonian fantasy is projected onto Marsine. The embrace, signifying in "reality" a fond farewell, is also a narcissistic embrace of love. As Robert "translates" herself into an editor, so Monime will be translated into an earthly reincarnation of Marsine. Monime as warrior queen can "come out" as a woman when, undisguised, she leads her troops to battle. But the price of her translation into military glory is the author's degraded signature of "translator."[69]

The heroines who are "translated" to realms of power are of male lineage. Monime, we learn, is heir to the throne of her father. Of her mother and aunt, we know nothing. It is the elder Lord Céton who is found; he has searched in vain for his wife. Monime's double, Marsine, flees the tryant Tracius with her father Bélus (4:160 ff.). Even the lesser heroines of interpolated tales are motherless. Perhaps the most dramatic of the patrilineal heroines is the solarian Sephise, Robert's Iphigenia. The fathers of Sephise, Marsine, and Monime, as well as Monime's father-king Charles I, are all victims of coups d'état. Sephise, offered up as a sacrifice, is metamorphosed into a star (5:214–53). Preceding Sephise's story, we learn that the solarians believe that stars are "suffused with divinity" (5: 212–13). The male line, then, leads to military glory, political power, spiritual elevation, and divinity.

The text authored by Robert, however, is matrilineal, even though the displacement of author by "translator" on the title page leaves no sign of its matrilineage. What gets lost in the translation is the author's own discourse. Paradoxically, in order to mother her text she is obliged to follow the male line. Yet the mother reappears in spite of herself. The novel closes with the birth of Monime and Céton's daughter and son.

The repressed signifiers of Robert's mothering return as so many disturbances of her Enlightenment discourse. The volume devoted to

69. Béthune, *Relation*, 2:7, protests against Amazonian heroines as "unnatural."

the sun, the planet of philosophers, is filled with the static of such disturbances. At first glance, it seems that the sun is a utopia amidst dystopias. Only Saturn, however, the last of the planets in the novel, approaches anything like a utopia. On the sun, dystopian elements demystify (masculine) philosophic values.

The solarians enact a discursive utopia of transparency. What they think and feel can be seen through their diaphanous bodies.[70] There is no need for dissimulation: "This is a world filled only with the learned; dissimulation, base flattery, and politicking are unknown here. Almost all of them are philosophers enlightened by reason. They say what they think, do what they promise to do" (5:106–7). Nevertheless, the descriptive language of the sun, like that of the novel in general, is not transparent but metaphorical. The sun is strewn with flowers of rhetoric and metaphysics: metaphors, fictions, hyperboles, and so forth. Pathways are pebbled with the jewels of witticisms (5:32, 35–36).

The vision of transparent signifiers is recuperated for a feminist discourse by an elaborate metaphor of Cartesian reason. The source of Robert's image is the passage from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516) in which Astolfo travels to the moon to recover Orlando's lost mind. Robert may have found the metaphor in Fontenelle's *Entretiens* (63–66). But whereas Fontenelle simply repeats the passage from Ariosto, Robert adapts it in a transfer of the scene to the sun, home of philosophers. Her lunatic moon is closer in spirit to Ariosto, but her sun is a more serious place. Unlike Fontenelle, she transforms Ariosto's joke into an egalitarian vision of human reason. In her sun's "enchanted forest" there are trees with golden trunks, silver branches, and emerald leaves. For fruit, they bear flasks containing "the mind and bon sens of all humans" (5:43–44). And just to make sure that we get the reference to the opening of Descartes's *Discourse on Method*, the author spells it out: "'Notice,' the genie told us as he had us examine the flasks, 'that nature, always just in the distribution of her gifts, doesn't favor one person over another. All men are born in perfect equality;

70. There is a similar vision of discursive transparency in Listonai's *Voyageur philosophe*, 1:93–94. Listonai, who professes skepticism about the plurality of worlds (2:123–28), takes his reader on a trip to the moon, where the narrator engages in "transparent" dialogues with a lunarian. The image of light which dominates Robert's sun is a central figure of enlightenment on Listonai's moon. Robert could well have known this work. Listonai adopts a Cartesian cosmology and theory of sensation and argues for the education of women. Béthune also evinces a desire for transparent discourse. The punishment for traitors and liars on his Mercury is that their bodies become transparent. They die broken into crystalline pieces. Béthune, *Relation*, 1:39.

education corrupts or perfects her blessings.' 'If that's the case,' I said, 'why aren't the flasks all equally filled?' 'It's because of the poor use that men make of nature's gifts,' the genie replied."[71]

Although the bejewelled trees and the rhetorical flowers carry the utopian overtones of a philosophic Garden of Eden, Robert's Cartesian metaphor suggests instead a demystification and a re-vision of Enlightenment ideals. Read against other passages in the *Voyages*, the magic trees evoke the feminist Cartesian message "the mind has no sex." In the first volume, Zachiel had offered an alternative version of the Fall, according to which there was originally no sex and no reproduction through sexual intercourse. It was only as a punishment for their vices that humans were metamorphosed into sexed bodies. Monime comments that according to this genealogy, "it seems that the mind has no sex."[72] Why are trees the vehicle for the Cartesian metaphor? Perhaps they are a reminder of Descartes's organic image of the tree of knowledge in his preface to the *Principles of Philosophy*.[73] They also evoke the alternative version of Genesis begun by Zachiel in Volume 1. Later in the journey on the sun, reflections on the solarians' egalitarian educational system explicitly feminize Descartes:

> In this world, men have no superiority over women, unless virtue, knowledge, bon sens, and reason confer it on them. It's certain that a woman can possess all these gifts equally, especially when she receives the same education. Women have this advantage; the same subjects and skills are taught them. . . . You could say that only in this world do they truly triumph, because bon sens, mind, and

71. Robert, *Voyages*, 5:44–45. Cf. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1950), 1–2: "Good sense [le bon sens] is mankind's most equitably divided endowment, for everyone thinks that he is so abundantly provided with it that even those most difficult to please in other ways do not usually want more than they have of this. As it is not likely that everyone is mistaken, this evidence shows that the ability to judge correctly and to distinguish the true from the false—which is really what is meant by good sense or reason—is the same by nature in all men; and that differences of opinion are not due to differences in intelligence, but merely to the fact that we use different approaches and consider different things. For it is not enough to have a good mind [l'esprit bon]: one must use it well." (My interpolations from the original.) Listonai also imitates the *Orlando furioso*, but there is no equivalent of Robert's conceit. See Listonai, *Voyageur philosophe*, 2:145–55.

72. Robert, *Voyages*, 1:47. The alternative genealogy may also be a satirical way of answering the old objection to the plurality of worlds that they could not house the descendants of Adam and Eve.

73. AT 9:14–15 (separately paginated).

> erudition shine equally in their speech, which proves that truth resembles light and that it strikes all minds eager to seek it. Nature, always judicious and liberal in distributing to each human being an equal portion of her gifts, has not claimed to favor one sex more than another. (5:107–9)

Light is the central metaphor on the sun, where "the age of Enlightenment" is an "age of women." Here the clear light of reason exposes the prejudice against women underlying the "enlightened" vision of a world that belongs to "all men."

It is possible to read the sun as an Enlightenment with women added on, so that the world can belong to them too. This reading, however, does not take into account the ways in which Robert's feminizing of Enlightenment discourse both disturbs it and leaves it intact. It is the tension between an acceptance of Enlightenment values and an awareness that they are not universal that can more properly be said to inform the language of this novel. The tension is apparent in Robert's rendering of nature, of Cartesian mechanism, of materialism, and of female education.

The divinization by solarian philosophers[74] of a nature that is just in its distribution of equality across the sexes challenges the Enlightenment concealment of gender inequality behind pieties about universal reason. The solarians' nature is a "superb divinity" (5:112–14), a vitalistic force infused in everything (répandue par-tout) (5:113). On Mars too, nobles and savants worship nature as the "invisible world-soul" (4:103–4).

Robert's vitalism contrasts with the more standard philosophic view of nature as a random combination of atoms, but philosophic chance also slips into her discourse. A solarian philosopher's speech on doubt slides into a meditation on the microcosm and the macrocosm and on a kind of heraclitean flux. Chance, then, is appropriated for a vitalist vision:

> Our most knowledgeable philosophers . . . teach us that we are only dispersed fragments of divinity itself, or drops separated from its essence, volatile spirits of eternity fixed by destiny or by chance in

74. Although it's tempting to translate Robert's "philosophes" simply as "philosophes," the presence on the sun of many philosophers from different historical periods has dictated my general choice of "philosophers." I will use "philosophic," however, to denote what pertains to the philosophes.

> the vehicles of time and matter. . . . The entire mass of the corporeal universe is but an extremely fine canvas, taken from the entrails of an infinite being and wrought by him with inimitable art. . . . It is certain that we are only so many disguised particles of divinity, to which we are related by sympathy, and that we're reduced to bodies by certain magnets or hidden charms. . . . That alone which seems firm and constant is the heavens and the stars, which persevere forever in their immutable course. (5:165–67)

But, we might say with equal reason, vitalism is appropriated for the philosophic discourse of chance. At times Robert sounds like a deist,[75] but the passage just cited is more consistent with her divinization of nature. The coexistence of vitalist echoes with deism and chance brings together several contradictory strains of Enlightenment thought. Here, the eclecticism appears as inconsistency and has a destabilizing effect on the philosophic discourse of the *Voyages*. Another reading of Robert's vitalist tendencies would place her in the tradition of what Margaret C. Jacob has called the "radical Enlightenment."[76] A passage on the physiological determination of mind sounds much like Diderot's monism (5:135–37), yet in another passage we find an explicit critique of the materialism that derives intelligence from a chance "conformation of fibres in the brain" (1:243–44).

Like the seventeenth-century cartésiennes, Robert rejects Cartesian mechanism and conserves those elements of Descartes's philosophy which help to erase prejudices about gender inequality: universal bon sens and doubt. Monime in Volume 1 speaks out against animal mechanism (1:52–4), and throughout the *Voyages*, mechanical imagery is a vehicle of disparagement. Similarly, the author of the *Relation du monde de Mercure* (Account of the World of Mercury) (1750), whose universe is composed of vortices, specifies that Mercury's animals have reason and communicate through an elaborate sign language.[77] Monime tells the lunarian Damon that on the moon "it amounts to about the same thing to be a handsome watch or a handsome man: both are mechanisms that break down easily and whose merit lies only in form and movement" (1:104). The lunarians simply imitate the vices of those around them, "like true automatons, moved by one

75. See, for example, 5:118.

76. Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 22.

77. Béthune, *Relation*, 1:65–66.

machine or set of springs" (1:252).[78] The thoughtless Mercurians are compared to "an unbalanced machine" (2:88–91). Robert's cosmology, however, is Cartesian,[79] and she invokes Cartesian doubt, in a rather un-Cartesian manner, as a support to the search for truth. The solarian philosopher advises, "Let's use our reason . . . but let us beware of getting lost on unbeaten paths: our enlightened mind teaches us to doubt and to stop when we can't clarify our doubts. . . . Since we've been seeking to discover truth, we can't yet be assured of having found it" (5:164–65). Similar counsel is delivered by an inhabitant of Saturn: received knowledge should always be subjected to the test of doubt. "There are few truths capable of demonstration," he says, "even among those that are the most widely received. Man's most sublime knowledge can usually be reduced to what is probable, a point at which one arrives via doubt" (7:49).

The author's selective use of Cartesian philosophy is consistent with her concept of a gender equality centered on the theme that "the mind has no sex." Yet her treatment of female education is shot through with ambivalence. If the mind is sex-neutral and thus in theory universally predisposed to education, why then is it that on the sun, where education is available to all equally, Monime resists an astronomy lesson with an impatient complaint of boredom? (5:98).

Monime's solarian astronomy lesson recalls the dilemma of Fontenelle's Marquise as a vehicle of instruction who is ultimately denied it. Like the Marquise, Monime is revealed as a figurative principle of pleasure and an object of compliments who turns an astronomy lesson into a metaphor of gallantry. During the lesson, which was originally meant for him, Céton leaves his telescope. "Did I need it to admire the fire that shone in Monime's eyes? I admit that I would have liked to limit all my observations to those two stars" (5:90). Meanwhile, Monime admits to total ignorance in astronomy: "I've always found this science a little too abstract to apply myself to it" (5:85). The astronomer reassures her, in language reminiscent of Fontenelle's, that "the study of [natural] philosophy does not at all diminish one's beauty: here all our ladies study it" (5:85). Pleased with her progress after an initial lecture on genies, he tells her that "a mind as penetrating as yours can now attend without boredom to the instruction that I'm going to give you" (5:90). With her mind so readied,

78. Robert's imagery of automatism could also be an allusion to the celebrated mechanisms of Jacques de Vaucanson.

79. See, for example, 1:276–79.

we might expect a conversion to astronomy after the fashion of the Marquise, but Monime's boredom with "all that abstract scientific rubbish" (5:98) quickly disabuses us. She asks Zachiel for a little respite, to which he mischievously replies that he will take her to hear the singing of birds in a nearby orchard. These birds, as Monime quickly comprehends, happen to be metamorphosed scholars.

Monime's ultrafeminine resistance to learning, however, does not simply recapitulate the experience of the Marquise, for it is inserted into the larger frame of the "mirror of princesses." As the Marquise figures a lay public whose relation to the advance guard of the Enlightenment is one of concealed subservience, Monime figures the enlightenment that women never had. Her genie leads her kicking and screaming, as it were, to yet more learning. At a later point during the sun voyage, she criticizes what she sees as sex discrimination in the solarian schools: Plato and Socrates offer instruction in the arts of love to women only. Yet inescapably this very critique is tainted with the ideology of gender.[80] Monime observes that such sex discrimination is all the more unjust in that solarian women, unlike those "in other worlds," are not "slaves of prejudices; but their avidity for knowledge serves only to dispose them to reflect on all life's events, and far from seeking to display their learning, they seem only the more modest for it" (5:211). Such ideological coloration is all the more noticeable on the sun, where Robert does not follow her heroine's prescription, but displays her own obviously very extensive knowledge of ancient and modern philosophers, astronomers, poets, and others. As in the case of Madeleine de Scudéry, her distant version of the *querelle des femmes* is inscribed in a learned language. We need to keep this language in mind when reading about a satirical Académie des Femmes on the moon, the planetary opposite of the sun in this system. The lunar institution is a fashion academy, where women learn everything about the latest style, "talents so useful to the coquettishness and the inconstancy of all the citizens of the moon" (1:257). Read as an isolated episode, the "academy" might be construed as a criticism of women's frivolity. As a complement to the

80. This type of ambivalence characterizes Béthune's treatment of women's education. Girls on Mercury are not taught sewing and embroidery, but enjoy educational equality with the boys. The narrator assures his readers, however, that learning has not impaired the women's beauty and that he has "sometimes heard very pretty persons chat in their boudoirs with the great Descartes about sublime matters, all the while arranging their beauty spots with marvelous art and with intentions far removed from Metaphysics." Béthune, *Relation*, 2:43.

sun voyage, the passage looks more like a critique of this academy, that is, of the standard education for eighteenth-century women. Like the cartésiennes, Robert hides her learning "modestly" behind the "translation." She alienates her language in that of the heroine Monime, whose learning is at best problematic.

What do the voyages teach Monime? Her intellectual gain is not in astronomy lessons or philosophic discourse, but rather in the examples and counterexamples of what she observes. The line between positive and negative example is not drawn by utopias and dystopias, a generic distinction that is not in any event made clear in the novel. As we've seen, the sun as a philosophic utopia of Enlightenment is disturbed by elements that, if not dystopian, are at least extraneous. Only the last planet visited, Saturn, can be said to approach utopia. On Saturn, where Monime would like to remain forever (7:151–52), it becomes evident that her education, as befits a ruler, is above all moral.

The Saturnian country of Abadie is a Rousseauean paradise. Echoes of Fontenelle, Voltaire, Diderot, and other philosophes, which are heard elsewhere in the *Voyages*,[81] are largely muted by strains of Jean-Jacques. On Saturn, Céton feels that he has found "the world's youth, that is, the time when men were not yet corrupt" (7:26). Abadians "follow natural law," and, like the solarians, they divinize nature (7:157–58). A representative family lives in modest simplicity, undisturbed by passions, working for the common good.[82] Boys and girls frolic together in "rustic gaiety" (7:15).

Abadie, nevertheless, is not a complete Golden Age. Its contradictions stamp it rather as an amalgam of philosophic musings on the ideal state. In a realm where luxury is decried, commerce flourishes (7:22) and there are banks (7:144). Robert's image of a "republic" of bees whose work for the "common good" sets an example for the Abadians (7:17–18) is quite different from the seraglio that Fontenelle had evoked in his "fable of the bees," a passage that he added in 1742 to the third evening of the *Entretiens* (98–101). (But perhaps Robert's image is not so very different from Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*.) The

81. A young man named Tacius whom the travelers meet on Mercury is almost a duplicate of Candide: "sa physionomie annonçoit la candeur de son ame" (2:229–30). The satirical use of an interstellar perspective is reminiscent of *Micromégas*. A digression on oracles in the sun voyage (5:254–92) recalls Fontenelle's *Histoire des oracles*. I have already mentioned the strains of a monistic materialism not unlike Diderot's.

82. Robert, *Voyages*, 7:14. The critique of luxury is a dominant polemic of the *Voyages*. See especially Volume 2, devoted to Mercury, the planet of spendthrifts.

beehive, the functioning of which was largely conjectural before Réaumur's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des insectes* (Papers for a History *of Insects*) (1740), was used indifferently as a metaphor for both a monarchy and a republic in the eighteenth century.[83] Robert's republican image is contradicted by the fact that Abadie has a monarch (7:21–25). The prince is an enlightened ruler who, in addition to developing trade, has nurtured manufacture, finance, technology, the arts, and jurisprudence (7:22–23). Owing to his benevolence, what Habermas has called a "bourgeois oppositional sphere"[84] has had a chance to thrive: "Here people are given the freedom to reveal dangerous abuses. . . . The freedom that our philosophers take in their writings has taught our poets and orators to make use of that noble eloquence which, in elevating our sentiments, corrects vice" (7:23). The author attempts to overcome these contradictions by presenting Saturn as a synthesis of nature and art, town and country, and as a place where "sweet equality reigns" (7:154–55) (but we know that the country has a social hierarchy).

Abadie's partially reconstructed Rousseauean women are modest and unassuming, and they recognize "love as the motive of everything" (7:134). (Love here is of the tendre amitié variety.) Divorce is permitted (7:139–40). The ideal husband and wife are in a relationship of complementarity the supposed equality of which is belied by an unequal distribution of advantages, for it is the man who has the education: "For a marriage to be happy, the man must have knowledge and principles; the wife, reason and a talent for detail. In the harmony that prevails between the two of them everything must tend toward the common good. Each should follow the lead of the other; each obeys and both are masters" (7:140–41).

Whatever the philosophic utopian virtues of this planet, we soon learn that, to take the utopia in its etymological sense, it's no place for

83. On the imagery of the beehive, see the fascinating series of articles in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 18 (1988): Carol Blum, "On the Uses of Bees," 3–5; Jeffrey Merrick, "Royal Bees: The Gender Politics of the Beehive in Early Modern Europe," 7–37; Ann Fairfax Withington, "Republican Bees: The Political Economy of the Beehive in Eighteenth-Century America," 39–77; and Roseann Runte, "From La Fontaine to Porchat: The Bee in the French Fable," 79–89. Since the political image of the beehive was ubiquitous, Robert may not have been thinking specifically of Fontenelle's "fable" here. It is more likely that the feminist utopia that figures in her novel *Les Ondins* (1768) is an evocation of the sociosexual organization that served as a model for cultural diversity in the *Entretiens*. See Chapter 4, below.

84. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

a woman. If we wonder why, like Candide and Cacambo, Céton and Monime leave utopian Saturn, the Abadian women provide a partial answer. Monime's destiny as a warrior queen, which can be fulfilled only on earth, as Zachiel obliquely informs her, places her at a far remove from the example of her docile Abadian sisters.

Monime's own example is unprecedented. Nowhere in her voyages has she met a warrior queen. (It is only to save her skin that Marsine decides to cross-dress as a warrior, and there is no indication that after her marriage she will continue her military exploits.) Yet the example of the Abadian women is not irrelevant to Monime's experience. She returns with an even greater knowledge of virtue than she had when she left. So central is this knowledge to her education that her adventures literally end on a note of virtue, the last word in the novel. Women schooled in virtue, the story seems to say, are especially fit to rule. Not so fit, however, that they are given ultimate responsibility. For at the novel's conclusion, Monime decides to share the crown with Céton (just in case, the author informs us, she were to die without children).[85]

Monime seems to have it both ways. She gets to defy French law as monarch, but she retains a very eighteenth-century image of femininity in her marriage to Céton. Theirs, however, cannot be the ideal Abadian relationship of complementarity, since she seems to hold all the cards: "knowledge," "principles," "reason," and a "talent for detail." Zachiel makes sure that her education as well as Céton's will continue to include those studies most useful for rulers: philosophy, ethics, history (7:260).

For French readers, Monime is an impossibility: an enlightened female monarch. Significantly, Robert locates Monime's country near that part of the world ruled by Catherine the Great, as if to specify that such a reign could only happen elsewhere. In a sense Robert moralizes the *Entretiens* by shifting the lessons to the domain of virtue. The virtue that Monime exemplifies is not quite the same as that found in Madeleine de Scudéry's *conversations*. Monime's individual feminine virtue is expanded to include the civic virtue of a ruler. At the same time, the translation of the mirror of princes into a mirror of princesses masculinizes the traditional concept of feminine virtue and feminizes civic virtue. With the accession of Céton to the throne, however, the way to the return of the royal male line is opened. Is

85. Edith Waldstein has pointed out to me that even a shared crown, in its legal impossibility, was a radical suggestion for French readers.

Monime only an aberration, a brief exotic excursion from the French Enlightenment? Is she finally, like Fontenelle's Marquise, brought only to the periphery of enlightenment?

Unlike the Marquise, Monime by her impossibility makes us rethink the very terms of eighteenth-century enlightenment. She invites us to question what was possible for women in the age of the philosophes. If, finally, the author takes a male "line," it is because Robert had no other discourse available to her. In this discourse, as on Saturn, there is no place for a woman. Monime exposes the fault lines of a discourse that constructed the world for "all men." Until women came out of utopia and into the world, the discourse would remain intact.

4

Femmes Philosophes or Femmes/Philosophes?

By the eighteenth century *femme philosophe* had generally come to replace the earlier *femme savante* in the then current lexicon.[1] As it gained ground, the term "philosophe" had also gained in specificity. Not only a contemplative spectator of the human comedy, a philosophe was assumed to have an interest in scientific developments and a slightly *frondeur* attitude toward society.[2] A femme philosophe was therefore possibly even more of an anomaly than a femme savante, for her learning more directly challenged traditional patterns of gender. The three women discussed in this chapter each in her own way illustrate the new dilemma of the femme philosophe. The novelist Marie Anne de Roumier Robert (1705–71) used philosophic narrative conventions to question existing social and gender arrangements. Emilie du Châtelet (1706–49) attempted to enter the intellectual lists of the philosophes with her work in natural and moral philosophy. Finally, Olympe de Gouges (1748–93), a self-identified feminist and revolutionary, defied the political and social order in both her activism and her writings.

Despite much contestation of Descartes's metaphysics and physics in the eighteenth century, the philosophes inherited and absorbed such basic features of Cartesianism as claims of scientific objectivity and intellectual impartiality, faith in reason's power to stamp out

1. Cf. Roseann Runte, "Woman as Muse," in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia I. Spencer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 151.

2. For a discussion of the different layers of social meaning that *philosophe* acquired during the eighteenth century, see Ann Thompson, "Le Philosophe et la société," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 190 (1980): 273–84.

préjugés, and a belief in the transparency of language, or the ability of the word to mirror the thing. As we have already seen in the case of Marie Anne de Roumier Robert's *Voyages de milord Céton dans les sept planettes*, the femme philosophe was positioned differently with respect to Enlightenment discourse than was the philosophe. The three women's writings, although diverse in focus, all reveal ambivalence about the discourse that they largely adopt. They had good reason to embrace "Enlightenment" enthusiastically, for the ongoing campaign against préjugés still wore a progressive aspect. However, with the erosion of dualism by the materialism and mechanism that were paradoxically initiated by Descartes, the slogan "the mind has no sex" lost some of its vigor.[3] Dualism unsexes the mind; materialistic monism reconnects it to the (sexed) body. None of these three writers directly confronted the issue of materialism's implications for women, but all three were touched by an intellectual climate in which women were excluded from the practice of a scientific knowledge that began to serve, in Jane Flax's phrase, as "the paradigm for all true knowledge."[4] Although none of these writers can be considered a Cartesian in any strict sense, the Cartesian discursive heritage resonates with varying intensity in the work of all three.

For a woman intellectual, the philosophe was of dubious value. Object of emulation, he held out hopes for a future of freedom and progress for all. Object of prestige in a masculine elite, he threatened women with an exclusion from reason that would deny them the intellectual and social solidarity that "enlightenment" alone could bring them. In this situation, it is not clear if for the femme philosophe the philosophe was ally or enemy or if, for that matter, the term "femme philosophe" was not fully as contradictory as "cartésienne."

Marie Anne de Roumier Robert: A "Nouvelle Philosophe"

The *Voyages de milord Céton* (1765–66) was arguably Marie Anne de Roumier Robert's most philosophic novel. Women authors of imagi-

3. See Geneviève Fraisse, *Muse de la raison: La Démocratie exclusive et la différence des sexes* (Aix-en-Provence: Alinéa, 1989), esp. 8, 29, 41.

4. Jane Flax, "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 42. See 42–43 for a succinct summary of the features of what I am calling "Enlightenment discourse." I use "Enlightenment discourse" to refer to the eighteenth-century struggle to bring the light of "reason" to the crumbling social, political, and intellectual edifice of the Old Regime. By "philosophic discourse" I mean the philosophes' specific use(s) of this discourse.

nary voyages, a subversive and philosophic genre, were scarce, perhaps because women were so restricted in their travels. Although Robert reserved the generic title for this work alone, voyages reappear generically, thematically, or metaphorically in almost all her novels. *Les Ondins, conte moral* (The Undines, a Moral Tale) (1768), was reprinted in Garnier's collection of *Voyages imaginaires* (in the class of "cabalistic novels") along with the *Voyages de milord Céton*.[5] *La Paysanne philosophe* (The Peasant-Girl Philosophe) (1762), a kind of feminine picaresque novel, contains an interpolated story of a voyage to Egypt. In *La Voix de la nature* (The Voice of Nature) (1763), the protagonists are shipwrecked in Africa, where they meet a princess who returns to France with them. This character, in her ongoing dialogue with the Europeans, serves a thematic function comparable to that of Montesquieu's Persians or Diderot's Tahitians. *Nicole de Beauvais, ou l'amour vaincu par la reconnaissance* (Nicole de Beauvais, or Love Vanquished by Gratitude) (1767), although it has elements of the picaresque, is the only one of Robert's works in which the voyage motif is virtually absent. Running throughout the novels is an adherence to a Cartesian vision of democratic reason given to all, a deism sometimes masked as sun worship, and a reverence for nature. Like the voyage, these philosophic elements are disturbed and destabilized by their transportation to a feminine world.

Les Ondins

Les Ondins, Robert's mythological novel, continues the meditation on female rule which underlies the *Voyages de milord Céton*. As in her earlier work, Robert flirts with the possibility of political and social empowerment for women. In this novel, she foregrounds the aspirations to feminine autonomy which were only latent in her more "philosophical" tale by creating the semblance of a feminist utopia. Following the dictates of an unfavorable oracle, the king of Lydia banishes his daughter Tramarine to Castora, an Amazonian fantasy land. Its ruler, Tramarine's aunt Pentaphile, is an exemplar of feminine merit, for she is an "Amazon who owed her realm to her valor alone."[6] When Tramarine breaks the law by giving birth to a son, she

5. See above, Chapter 3.

6. [Madame Robert], *Les Ondins, conte moral*, in Garnier, *Voyages imaginaires*, 34:164. Further page references to this edition will appear in parentheses in the text.

is sentenced to a long imprisonment. Rescue arrives with Verdoyant, the prince of the Undines who had seduced her during water rites reserved for Castorian reproduction. He takes her to the Empire of the Sea (Empire des Ondes), where after a series of adventures she is reunited with her father and her son. Tramarine thus travels a complete circuit from one male-dominated land to another. What, then, should we make of Castora, placed as it is at the center of her journey?

Robert's rendition of the Amazon myth is closer to Christine de Pizan's than it is to Madeleine de Scudéry's.[7] Robert's Amazons, like those in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, live in an all-female state. De Scudéry's "new Sauromates," inspired by Herodotus's Sauromatae, include both men and women. De Scudéry in fact transforms the country into a capital of tendre amitié, where Sapho can live in unwedded bliss with Phaon. De Scudéry critically revises the ancient myth with her "new Sauromates," for it is not possible to enter their country without first going through that of the "old Sauromates." Travelers are startled by the contrast between the brutal, savage older country and the newer one, which has been civilized by the précieux code of love.[8]

Les Ondins leaves little clue as to its sources. Presumably Robert knew de Scudéry's novels. Louis Rustaing de Saint Jory may have provided material from *Les Femmes militaires* (1736), his imaginary voyage to an island where sexual egalitarianism reigns and women bear arms along with men.[9] Robert may have seen or read *Les Amazones*, a tragedy by Marie Anne Fiquet du Boccage which was performed by the Comédiens Ordinaires du Roi in the summer of 1749 and published in 1762. This Racinian drama of passion features the Amazonian queen Orithya, who is devoured by murderous jealousy when Theseus, her captive, falls in love with Antiope, the heiress apparent to the throne.[10] Like other modern versions of the myth, Robert's

7. Abby Zanger was very helpful to me on this point. For a brief recapitulation of the literary fortunes of the Amazons in early modern French literature, see Georges Ascoli, "Essai sur l'histoire des idées féministes en France du XVIe siècle à la Révolution," *Revue de Synthèse Historique* 13, no. 1 (1906): 44 and 13, no. 2 (1906): 174–75.

8. See Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Paul Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), 40–51, and [Madeleine] de Scudéry, *Artamène, ou Le Grand Cyrus*, 10 vols. (Paris: Augustin Courbé, 1649–53), 10:959–1031.

9. [Rustaing de Saint Jory], *Les Femmes militaires: Relation historique d'une isle nouvellement découverte* (Amsterdam: J. Ryckhoff Fils, 1736).

10. [Marie Anne (Le Page) Fiquet] du Boccage, *Les Amazones*, in *Recueil des Oeuvres de Madame du Bocage* [*sic*] (Lyon: Les Frères Perisse, 1762), 1:107–95.

novel uses the Amazons to thematize the relation of women to heterosexual love.

Robert may well have had in mind Fontenelle's fable of the bees, which he added to the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* in 1742. Castora reflects an ambivalence about female political and sexual power similar to that registered in the work of her predecessor. Fontenelle's apiary state, located in the vague eighteenth-century "Orient," was an image of cultural diversity on earth, which in turn figured the possibility of different human societies on other planets. Whereas on one planet, the Philosopher tells his pupil, war may be unknown and love may prevail, on another, "people enjoy eternal Peace, but in its midst Love is unknown, and people are bored."[11] "Love," at least of the heterosexual variety, is absent from Castora. With his metaphorical beehive, Fontenelle painted the picture of an industrious but chaste nation of "Arabs." Sexual reproduction, initially presented as a mystery, is explained by the queen's use of her drones, "foreigners" in the state who compose her "seraglio." The eventual murder of the drones after the accomplishment of their task ("the Arabs mercilessly kill these Strangers who have become useless to the State" [99]) demystifies Fontenelle's implict claim to respect cultural pluralism. Whatever the virtues of chastity and industriousness, his depiction of the violence inflicted on the drones, which goes far beyond Mandeville's "private vices," belongs to nothing less than a barbarous society. Moreover, the apiary nation carries the popular disfavor surrounding the African or Asian "orient." Although Robert eliminates males from Castora—there is no equivalent of the drones—female rule turns out to be almost as brutal in Castora as among Fontenelle's insects.

Readers of a much more recent Amazonian tale, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), will find their expectations of a feminist utopia disappointed in Robert's Castora. Like Abadie in the *Voyages de milord Céton*, Castora is misleadingly utopian. Initially, however, it seems to be a very good place for a woman. Pentaphile is described as "the best princess in the world" (165). Castora's radical feminism allows for the fulfillment of female aspirations and talents, as if the author wanted to suggest that only in a regime of radical feminism could such fulfillment be possible. On the women's construction of a temple to Pallas Athena, the narrator comments that, whatever critics

11. [Bernard Le Bovier de] Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. Alexandre Calame (Paris: Didier, 1966), 97.

may say about the implausibility of such an event, "a woman who has received the same education as a man can undertake anything" (169). But as the story unfolds, dystopian elements creep in.

The story of the founding of the state casts doubt on its integrity. Unlike Herland and the land of the Sauromatae in ancient myth, Castora was the product of conscious decision. The male narrator informs us that the queen's edict banning men from Castora was the result of her disappointment in love. In a rare intrusion of his voice, he tells us that he was not party to the decision. Although he has some sympathy for the "refusal of love," he hints that it came from disgruntled "old dowagers," too decrepit for love (164–66).

It is on the issues of love and sexual reproduction that the question of Castora's utopianism hinges. At the founding of the state, the Amazons had to override objections on the part of men concerned about the unresolved issue of human reproduction. Parthenogenesis occurs, as in Herland, under the protection of a goddess. In both novels, the holy atmosphere of temples dedicated to goddesses seems to serve as an unspoken means to ward off the temptation of same-sex love. The dialectic of same and other, autonomy and dependence, is played out in the field of female sexuality. A fountain for miraculous birth given to the Castorians by Pallas Athena is at first mistaken for the one in which Narcissus saw his reflection, as if to signify that in an all-female state the narrative choices are between love of same or no love at all.[12]

The dystopian elements crystallize around Tramarine's sexuality. The story of her son's birth is an elaborate double entendre in which an insidious heterosexuality subverts the Castorian homosocial (or homosexual) world. When the princess reaches puberty, she begins to suffer from a suspicious melancholia, which announces to us her first, unconscious (hetero)sexual stirrings. She feels that she is "not made to spend her life with everyone surrounding her" (172). At this point we are told that "love, which is one of the passions . . . that causes

12. Robert may have found the sacred fountain and the water rites in Celtic legend. See John Arnott MacCulloch and George Foot Moore, *The Mythology of All Races* (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1916–32), 3:79–82. She may also be alluding to ancient theories of panspermism and reports from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of births caused by sperm in bath water. See Pierre Darmon, *Le Mythe de la procréation à l'âge baroque* (Paris: Pauvert, 1977), 121–29. Thomas Laqueur cites a similar passage in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* as an instance of a "poetry of biology" created through the sixteenth-century discursive grid of correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm. See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 118–19.

the most trouble, had to be banished forever from a kingdom inhabited by the same sex." As the official story goes, evil witches presided at the conception of Tramarine's son at the sacred fountain, where she was nevertheless well guarded, attended by a suite of four thousand Amazons and served by priestesses who day and night never left her. (Are the omnipresent priestesses also lovers by metonymic displacement?) The implicit accusation that Tramarine engaged in heterosexual relations seems to rest on early modern theories of sexual reproduction which assigned responsibility for the production of males to male sperm.[13]

Only later in the narrative, during her imprisonment, do we learn the secret story, when Tramarine confides the truth to her first lady-in-waiting. In this version, the priestesses do leave her alone after they undress her for her bath, at which moment a Cupid-like man emerges from the water. The description of the fateful encounter between the two is filled with unmistakable sensuality: "Timid in front of him, I trembled with fear; but approaching me with a majestic and tender look, he took my hand and clasped me in his arms. Alas! how seductive he was! I cannot . . . describe to you the agitation [*trouble*] that he aroused in my soul. His first glance has forever stamped it with the strongest passion. . . . My eyes, fixed on such a seductive object, seemed to remove my power to resist his caresses, when the priestesses approached and made him disappear. I noticed that when he went away he put his finger to his lips, undoubtedly to signal to me not to reveal anything of what had happened" (204). The next day her "conqueror" arrives again, and their passion is consummated: "He approached me, made me tender and passionate speeches. Animated by his presence, I don't know . . . what I must have answered to transport him with pleasure, for he suddenly embraced me. Sparks flew from his eyes into my veins and I felt all afire. I wanted to flee; my strength abandoned me; but, in my agitation [le trouble qui m'agitoit], I thought that he wanted to carry me off with him" (205). The priestesses hear her cries of alarm as the waves swell, and they scurry to the scene in time for her to fall faint in their arms.

Hedged as it is by sexual taboo, this primal scene cuts off the utopian discourse and subverts the radical feminism of the novel. It becomes the pretext for an Enlightenment protest against the denial

13. See Darmon, *Mythe*, 154. I am grateful to the members of the Seminar on Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture at Harvard's Center for Literary and Cultural Studies for the questions they raised on theories of sexual reproduction when I presented part of this material as a paper there.

of civil liberties by Pentaphile, now a figure of tyranny. Tramarine complains to her lady-in-waiting that even if her lover hadn't imposed silence on her, she wouldn't have felt free to defend herself at her trial. "You know that we're constrained [in Castora] even in our very thoughts, continuously hounded by women whose bigotry and hypocrisy make their company unbearable. Those women would give up their lives rather than their opinions" (207). Tramarine's trial turns into a campaign against censorship when she alleges as her only defense "the power of imagination." Ambiguously, she asks her prosecutors, if not her readers, to believe that the image of her lover's face alone was responsible for her "crime." Several young Amazons on Tramarine's side urge passage of a new law allowing for freedom of the imagination. Pentaphile's aged chancellor and "all the old doyennes of the court" persuade her that such a law could end in the overthrow of the state (189). When Tramarine's partisans are ready to rise up in protest, the chancellor counsels the queen to punish the rebels for their "seditious speech." Under pressure, Pentaphile issues a decree enjoining her subjects to visit Pallas's fountain at least once a year and forbidding them "to use in any way the power of imagination" (190–91).

Verdoyant's parting gesture to Tramarine seems to have gotten lost in the shuffle of civil libertarian agitation over "imagination." The original responsibility for censorship must surely be laid at his door. The hullabaloo surrounding the new decree cannot dispel our suspicion that "imagination" was not the culprit in Tramarine's crime. In both the official and the secret version of the story, the "crime"—(hetero)sexuality—is unspeakable, as was any kind of sexuality for the woman writer of the late Old Regime.

Tramarine's mythological marriage to the immortal Verdoyant sidesteps the resolution of Robert's sexual and textual dilemma. Since Verdoyant is an incubus of sorts, he makes it possible to reconcile the two conflicting stories of the birth of Tramarine's son in bypassing heterosexual reproduction altogether.[14] Both Verdoyant, who is not allowed to marry a mortal, and Tramarine, who is not allowed to marry a man, must overcome taboos in order to wed. When Tramarine gains immortality through her marriage, she is no longer really a woman, just as the genie Verdoyant is not really a man.

This mythology, however, is subverted by an "enlightened" discourse. Womanist and Enlightenment strains converge in the com-

14. Robert, *Ondins*, 208–9. On demonic sexuality, see Darmon, *Mythe*, 129–32.

ments of Tramarine's lady-in-waiting, Céliane, on Verdoyant's initial abandonment of her mistress. Such conduct in a mere man, Céliane says, would not be surprising, since "it's so rare to find one with sincere affection that until now I thought fidelity was a virtue reserved for the gods. But your adventure has made me change my mind. It makes me see that the gods, like men, tire of their beloved as soon as they've satisfied their desires" (208). Céliane appeals to reason to demystify superstition and denounce the oppression of women.

Tramarine's traditionally pious response marks her as a conventional passive heroine. Far from being the dynamic center of a Bildungsroman, she is a vehicle for the discursive interplay of enlightenment and sexuality. "Let's not blame the gods," she says, "they undoubtedly have their reasons. . . . It's not up to us poor mortals to try to divine them. We must submit without a murmur to whatever fate they may have in store for us." "Madame," Céliane replies drily, "I can only admire the piety of your sentiments."[15] Later, in an interview with Verdoyant's father, king of the Undines, Tramarine's piety serves as the foil for the king's thinly veiled deism (222). When the king rebukes his son for choosing a "pagan" bride (she mistakes the king for Neptune), Verdoyant appeals to the irresistible power of love, which overcomes religious and philosophical differences: "Love examines nothing and makes no distinction between the heart of a pagan and of a genie" (223). Moreover, Verdoyant will answer for his bride's "docility in taking your instructions" and assures his father that she will "submit without a murmur to whatever you will." Tramarine adds her assent, "convinced that such an enlightened genie would not try to catch her off guard" (224).

The enlightened king stands in sharp opposition to the misguided queen of Castora, just as the docile Tramarine is worlds away from the Amazons. In an enlightened kingdom, so the story seems to go, the monarch is male, the rule is love, and women are submissive. The journey seems to have left the vision of female rule far behind, but we are not done with it yet. The second and final part of the novel, which is devoted to the travels of Verdoyant and Tramarine in the Undine

15. Robert, *Ondins*, 208–9. In the second part of the novel, where the accomplishment of the oracle is related, the Lydian king blames himself for his misfortunes. He shouldn't have contributed to them, he says, "by my foolish credulity, or rather, my foolish vanity in wanting to penetrate the decrees of the gods" (267–68). Which was it, credulity or vanity? On this question hangs the discursive importance of the passage: an expression of traditional faith, deism, or Enlightenment skepticism?

empire, opens with another tale of female rule and closes with the destruction of Castora.

The first chapter of Part 2, "Story of the Great Giant," could be the story of Castora revised. Owing to the machinations of an intriguer at court (a figure for Madame Du Barry?), one of the states has erupted in civil strife. Brought to court as a girl by the unsuspecting queen, the culprit has since grown into a giant with power and influence to match her size. Unlike the evil chancellor of Castora, the giant is faced with imminent defeat because the queen plans to marry her off to a wicked magician (243–47). The chapter closes with a terrifying, Sphinx-like vision of the three-faced giant. Because we never learn the dénouement, we are free to believe that in this story female rule does not end in disaster but that the queen, unlike Pentaphile, is able to triumph over her treacherous courtier.

Love and sexuality play no significant part in this episode. But the fall of Castora is explicitly tied to the power of love and implicitly to the threat of female sexuality. Verdoyant's defense of (heterosexual) love as an irresistible, universal force that eradicates barriers of class and kind (mortals and immortals can fall in love) is vindicated not only by his own adventure but also by two subplots that belong to the second part of the novel: the story of the marriage of Tramarine's younger sister, Brillante, to Cupid; and the recognition scene in which Tramarine recovers her son. This last subplot involves the conquest by the long-lost son, Prince Nubécula, of a princess, Amasis, through performance of Herculean labors necessary to win her hand. The princess, reputed to be graceless and physically deformed, is revealed at the wedding to be a beautiful woman. Her transformation is testimony to the power of love, which is also the power of imagination. Love alone, we are told, "is capable of cheering the spirit and entertaining the imagination. For without love, isn't one denied the pleasures of pomp, rank, and wealth?" (289). Amasis, like Tramarine, is a traditional heroine. "It seemed that Love and the Graces took pleasure in forming her: . . . candor and modesty were written on her face, which made her all the more beautiful. Not that she had that savage air which drives away love and dulls beauty, but rather the sweet, innocent, childlike modesty that inspires respect at the same time that it inflames desire" (303). Her wedding is a celebration of conventional heterosexuality, necessary for the maintenance of universal (patriarchal) order.[16] "It's only in the alliance of Love with

16. Robert may have known Marivaux's one-act play, *La Colonie* (1750), in which

his brother Hymen that you find reason, fidelity, justice, and purity. It's only through Hymen that blood ties, those sweet bonds of son and brother, can be formed. He alone can keep you from the corrupt sources of crime" (289–90).

With the story of Amasis and victorious love, we return full circle to Castora. One triumph invites another, and, as Hercules conquered the Amazons, so Nubécula's conquest of the princess leads logically to his conquest of Castora. Castora threatens collectively what Amasis's physical deformity threatened individually: the cessation of sexual reproduction. In Robert's novel, women are the carriers of the pre-Malthusian eighteenth-century anxiety about population, which, in Robert's words, "should always be the nation's wealth" (169). Accordingly, immediately after the wedding a divine emissary from the sun calls upon Nubécula to conquer and annex Castora. As if to highlight the significance of this heterosexual crusade, Amasis receives permission to accompany her husband.

The dénouement contains no further information on the invasion, but the genie's prophecy of continuing favor to Nubécula and his posterity (309) leaves little doubt as to its outcome. The defeat of Castora, however, is not Robert's last word in *Les Ondins*. The novel ends with the remarriage of Tramarine's mother, Cliceria, widowed at the conquest of her husband's kingdom, to a man of her choice. By the conclusion of the novel, the liberation of the kingdom has taken place and so the rule falls to her.

The marriages of the three royal women, Queen Cliceria and her two daughters, are a victory for relative female autonomy within a patriarchal family regime. By their flight into mythological love matches, the two sisters escape the conventional elite political marriage. Moreover, the death of their two brothers in the takeover of the kingdom leaves the two daughters next in line for the throne. (There is evidently no Salic law here.) Cliceria's first marriage was an arranged one, and although it seemed happy enough, the second time around she gets to choose. Both Cliceria and Tramarine end up as joint rulers with their husbands.

In this context of limited rule for women, the radical feminism of Castora appears less like a threat than a permanent temptation. Although there are distinctions of rank in Castora, Pentaphile's rule by

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(heterosexual) love finally triumphs over the attempt by a group of women to institute a separate political community. See Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours* (Paris: des femmes, 1977), 200–204.

merit (164) contrasts with the inherited rule of Lydia. It is interesting that the original French word for what I've translated as "merit" (valeur) is said to be the standard motive for the loveless marriages that prevailed in Amasis's country (290). In the cases of both marriage and political rule, "valeur" is displaced by heterosexual love. And yet the monument to what can be retranslated as Amazonian "value" remains: the temple to Pallas. Castora is the novel's horizon of possibility for women, a territory bristling with the pleasurable dangers of the forbidden. The exceptional inverted rule of the "woman-on-top," as Natalie Z. Davis has argued of sexual symbolism in early modern French festive customs, "confirmed subjection throughout society, but it also promoted resistance to it."[17] Both a promise and a threat, Castora represents the ultimate abolition of préjugés: the unmooring of gender from its fixed roles. As such, it is enlightened beyond Enlightenment.

La Voix de la nature

The conquest of Castora places an interdiction on the radical Other who is a staple of voyage literature. Robert's voyages to nowhere are surrounded by warnings against women's trespass into a largely masculine genre. In *La Voix de la nature*, the author precedes an interlude in Africa by an apology for a brief geographical and anthropological introduction that is stylistically similar to those found in actual accounts of voyages: "Here is . . . a picture that is only very lightly sketched. But really it took a lot for a woman to have the courage to undertake it. If you want more details, you can read accounts by voyagers, who have produced large volumes on the subject."[18] In *La Paysanne philosophe*, the episode of the voyage to Egypt is preceded by no such excuse. Instead, the preface to the novel as a whole consists of the standard apology for women's writing. The narrator of the voyage episode does, however, refer her interlocutor to travel accounts for further information on Egypt.[19] It was so unusual for wom-

17. Natalie Z. Davis, "Woman on Top," in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 151.

18. [Marie Anne de Roumier Robert], *La Voix de la nature, ou les aventures de Madame la marquise de* * * *, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1763), 3:196. Further references to this novel appear in parentheses in the text. Because the two volumes of the novel are divided into five separately paginated parts, the first number of the citation refers to the part.

19. [Marie Anne de Roumier Robert], *La Paysanne philosophe, ou les aventures de Madame la comtesse de* * * * (Amsterdam: Chez les Libraires Associés, 1762), 2:93. Further references to this novel will be found in the text. The first number refers to the part.

en of the Old Regime to travel abroad that one of the characters in *La Voix de la nature* who does so disguises herself as a man in order to avoid her father's displeasure (4:64 ff.). It was in 1767, shortly after the publication of this novel, that a woman disguised as Philibert Commerson's valet boarded a ship with him to go on Bougainville's celebrated voyage.[20]

The figure of the radical Other in *La Voix de la nature* is the African princess Mirka. The novel's progression, however, gradually erases her difference, giving her a curious resemblance to the Amazons of Castora. In some respects, she is from her first appearance the mirror image of the novel's French heroine, Adelaïde. The romance-like plot of *La Voix de la nature* features the adventures of this orphaned heroine: abductions, captivity, reunion with parents, siblings, and lover. She is shipwrecked off the coast of Africa after her abduction by a man who is revealed to be her brother. In Africa, she is mysteriously transported to a harem, where she becomes friendly with Mirka, the king's favorite.

When the king announces his choice of Adelaïde as Mirka's successor, the two women become linked in a sisterhood of oppression. It is Mirka who helps Adelaïde escape. Later she herself flees the country with the party of Europeans. The friendship becomes so close that Adelaïde actually regrets her own departure: "I would have given anything to spend the rest of my life with her" (3:227). Just as Adelaïde's abduction separated her from her lover Verneuil, so Mirka has lost a French lover, du Vivier, whose shipwreck had also landed him in Africa. A coincidental meeting with this lover on the trip back to France reveals him to be a friend of Verneuil's. The interchangeability of the two female characters is suggested by a theatrical that the group performs on the ship home: Adelaïde plays an African princess converted to Christianity and Mirka plays her sister. Adelaïde's "real" sister, Madame d'Embleville (the character who has traveled in masculine disguise), plays Mirka's brother.

Moreover, Mirka's difference is not marked by her color. In fact, we are never sure of her color. Robert is not without consciousness of color and ethnicity, however, as we see when she informs us that the people of Mirka's country are of various colors (3:195–96). Color is a marker for the slaves, who are clearly black (3:227, 4:3–6). It also signals a general difference between Europeans and Africans. But

20. See Renée-Paule Guillot, "La Vraie 'Bougainvillée': La Première Femme qui fit le tour du monde," *Historama* 1 (1984): 36–40.

once the author explicitly addresses distinctions of color and ethnicity, she slips into racist discourse. Du Vivier's account of his adventures include his rescue by a Jew named Samuel from a group of Arab attackers. Samuel agrees to help du Vivier look for Mirka, who has gotten lost in the fray, only on the condition that they disguise themselves as black Africans. He has something to darken their skin, he says, but nothing for the hair, a "kind of curly wool" (4:154). Samuel's difference is strongly marked. We never learn his last name, and the party of travelers observes certain other social distinctions with him. He is described as a "very learned man with much wit and judgment" (4:149–50). When he and du Vivier don their disguise, du Vivier jokes that he wants to circumcise Samuel's nose, whose length risks compromising the disguise. Samuel, understandably enough, doesn't see the humor and is ready to drop the whole enterprise. Du Vivier mollifies him with the offer of a reward as the narrator comments on Jewish susceptibility to bribes.

By not specifying Mirka's color, Robert immunizes her from this kind of degradation and facilitates the play of difference and sameness in her character's relationship with Adelaïde and the Europeans. Mirka's difference lies not in her color or features, but in her discourse. Paradoxically, she's a figure of Enlightenment. To the Europeans, attached to their established religion, she preaches a deism cast in the form of sun worship. Sounding much like Diderot's Orou, Mirka advocates prayer under the open skies on a mountain top, the site of her informal marriage with du Vivier (4:143). She can't understand how God can hear prayers from within walls (4:94). Finally she does agree to submit to proselytizing, even though she asserts that the theologians "will have trouble convincing me that the Sun isn't the same God you worship in a different religion" (4:96).

Once the party reaches America, the process of Mirka's assimilation to Western culture begins. Du Vivier tries to persuade her to marry him in good form, but he has trouble overcoming her culture shock. "Natural law was engraved on her heart, and as it's the only law that common reason adopts when one is not instructed by the light of Faith, she thought that all our formalities were useless and contended that suitability of character, the union of two hearts, and sincerity should be sufficient" (4:164).

The "voice of nature" is deeply ambivalent. It calls from beneath the plot's various disguises of blood ties with all the allure of the dangerously familiar. Feelings of strong affection between Adelaïde and Bracmont (her brother) and between Madame d'Embleville and a

character we know only as the Count skirt incest before recognition heads off catastrophe. On the other hand, deeply felt affection between women is vindicated when the family bond is revealed: Adelaïde and Madame d'Embleville, who have formed a loving friendship, turn out to be sisters. Another strong friendship between Madame d'Embleville and an abbess is enriched by the discovery that they are mother and daughter. The incest theme, which played such a prominent part in the *Voyages de milord Céton,* highlights the temptations of the love of same. The very "naturalness" of this love is fraught with peril. *Les Ondins* raises the possibility of same-sex love, which when not "aim-inhibited" in the Freudian sense, becomes much more threatening than the homosocial friendships or the heterosexual affections in *La Voix de la nature.* The voice of nature is both beneficent—it returns an entire family to the orphaned Adelaïde—and menacing. Madame d'Embleville's meditation on Bracmont's abduction of his sister captures the ambivalence: "What is this blood tie? Are these stirrings so similar to love that you can be deceived?" (4:60).

Mirka's "natural law" seems to represent nature's more benevolent voice. Transported to France, Mirka becomes the spokesperson for a better, simpler life, unfettered by "formalities." "Probity, honor, and delicacy of feeling" are more prevalent in her own country than in France, she says (5:131). At home, "we follow only right reason, which leads us to do good for the sake of good alone" (5: 132). (These comments sound rather odd coming from someone who fled the harem, but the contradiction is not explored in the novel.) Mirka's visit to the abbess's convent is the occasion for a clash between anticlericalism and revealed religion which seems to redound to the favor of the visitor and her "natural" faith (5:6).

The eloquence of Mirka's "natural voice" notwithstanding, by the novel's end she is converted to Christianity. At first an apparent expedient for her official marriage to du Vivier (4:199), the conversion will later be justified by du Vivier's miraculous recovery from an injury sustained in a duel. Natural law and Christianity are not absolute bipolar opposites. Instead, Mirka's conversion marks a progressive integration of the "primitive" into civilization. Unlike the echoes of cultural relativism which close Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville,* the conclusion of *La Voix de la nature* marks the eventual triumph of Christianity. The novel leaves us with the picture of Adelaïde's father (the mysterious Count) advising her husband that their son should be taught the genealogy of Christianity, which proceeds

from natural law, through the Mosaic law, and on to that of Christ (5:173–74). Universal religion encompasses all others.

Mirka, who from the beginning, as we have seen, was more a counterpart than an opposite to Adelaïde, must be assimilated to the French example in order for her "natural" message to bear witness. The radical Other is integrated into a model of progress in which the "lower" is assimilated to the "higher." Accordingly, Mirka's conversion to the Christian religion is part of her general conversion to Frenchness. This broader conversion is signaled by linguistic assimilation. When Mirka and Adelaïde meet in Africa, Mirka has some knowledge of French, and Adelaïde begins to learn Mirka's language. The reciprocity disappears in France, where du Vivier insists that Mirka speak only the language of that country. Mirka's cultural journey in some respects repeats that of Adelaïde, who had to discard her Norman accent and costume in order to be assimilated to Parisian culture (1:33–39).

Joan DeJean has commented that in the eighteenth century "teaching Frenchness" became a paramount cultural task. It was during the Enlightenment, when the French language and literature were introduced into the national curriculum, she points out, that women writers were excluded from the canon of French fiction.[21] "Teaching Frenchness" entailed absorption and/or exclusion of all "foreign" elements, including women. *La Voix de la nature* is like a manual for this pedagogy. As Mirka's natural law and religion become assimilated to Frenchness by their inclusion as moral principles, French law and religion are made to seem natural. Zilia, the heroine of Françoise de Graffigny's enormously successful *Lettres d'une péruvienne* (1747), a novel that Robert could well have known, painfully acquires the French language (and much of French culture), but resolutely clings to the religion of her native land. Mirka absorbs the whole of French culture. Her conversion hinges on her acknowledgment that one universal religion is simply in the nature of things. As the abbess says, "You have only to use your reason to be convinced" (4:206).

La Voix de la nature problematizes enlightenment. For if Mirka speaks Enlightenment discourse, her voice is silenced at the end of the novel, when anti-clericalism loses out to the church. Should we then read the novel as a retrograde anti-Enlightenment tract? Mirka's

21. Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: The Politics of Female Authorship under the Late Ancien Régime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 182–99. See also her "Teaching Frenchness," *French Review* 61 (February 1988): 398–404, and her "Classical Reeducation: Decanonizing the Feminine," *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988): 26–39.

eloquent defense of "sun worship" and pleas for tolerance—"I don't believe I've offended by choosing a husband I love, . . . whose only defect is that he wasn't born African" (4:147)—hardly warrant this conclusion. Instead, the novel captures the contradictions of eighteenth-century Enlightenment: at once a challenge to French tradition and an apology for French hegemony. Looking at the "primitive" and the "natural," the philosophe found not the Other, as Michèle Duchet has shown, but the same. The "primitive" served as a focal point for meditation on the "civilization" that destroyed it.[22] Mirka is not simply converted; she is colonized. If she speaks philosophic discourse, so do those who convert her, for they appropriate her in the name of the peace and harmony that all the philosophes wanted.

In Mirka's discourse and in her ultimate conquest by and for the French, Robert illustrates Michèle Duchet's concept of the Enlightenment's double face, the philosophic and the hegemonic. It is of great interest that Robert chose a woman as the vehicle for philosophic discourse. Mirka's philosophic face is finally the hidden one, overshadowed by the aspect of French hegemony. In this novel, the condition on which a woman can speak philosophically is the loss of her identity. Colorless, without a language and nation of her own, she is left only with her sex.

La Paysanne philosophe

Robert puts the identity of another of her philosophic heroines even more spectacularly in question. The "philosophy" of Flore, the protagonist of *La Paysanne philosophe* is revealed to be so profoundly derivative that her discourse cannot even be said to be her own.

La Paysanne philosophe is built on both the marriage plot and what I will call the social mobility plot. Like Marivaux's *Paysan parvenu* (1735), Flore moves, if not from rags to riches, at least from humble station to high social rank. Adopted at birth by a noblewoman and her male companion, another nameless count, she travels through the vicissitudes of multiple interpolated stories to her final destination of marriage with her benefactor.

Flore, who is also the narrator of the novel, comments philosophically, but not without contradictions, on the prejudices of class and gender. Once again, the democratic message has Cartesian overtones:

22. See Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières: Buffon, Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvétius, Diderot* (Paris: Maspero, 1971).

"Knowledge, intellect, and reason [l'esprit et le bons sens] are given to all humans, in whatever station heaven happened to place them" (1:10). It is noteworthy that Robert chooses the word "humans" and not "men," a more commonly employed "universal" term. An interpolated story further emphasizes the point and makes a dramatic plea for improvement in female education. The young Mademoiselle de Richeval is entrusted to a governess who is instructed only to indulge her in her every whim. The result of this regimen is that at the age of eleven she becomes pregnant.

Despite repeated complaints about the authority of the *grands*, Flore's rise to aristocratic rank validates the importance of social distinctions. Robert hesitates between a contestation of socially constructed hierarchy and an endorsement of natural difference. One of Flore's suitors, known only as the Baron, speaks of her "noble mode of thought" (1:188), implying that, whatever her birth, she has a natural nobility. This same character later marries an aristocratic young woman initially disguised as a man. Although he doesn't guess her sex, he is struck by her "air of nobility that can't be disguised" (2:108).

If human qualities that resist disguise are natural, this passage might lead us to conclude that class is more natural than gender. Other passages reveal, however, that Robert's treatment of gender is every bit as contradictory as her treatment of class. The Baron says of Flore that she has a "greatness of soul that is rare to find in persons of your sex." He adds, "if you weren't born of a distinguished family, nature has fully compensated you by all the other fine qualities with which she's adorned you, which aren't always found in those of noble extraction" (1:188–89). Such remarks cut two ways. Flore's defiance of the norms of class and gender makes her either an iconoclast or the exception that proves the rule of nature.

There is less ambiguity about gender, at least, in the voyage episode. There Robert takes a philosophic distance on Egypt and its customs, insinuating that superstitions are not confined to that nation: "The Egyptians are as superstitious as the Spaniards. It seems that this country is the center of ridiculous ceremonies. The ancient Egyptians adored . . . the most vile animals, and their blindness made them go so far as to deify plants. It's hard to understand how a polite people, filled with genius and enlightened by learning, could be capable of such blindness, but they're not the only ones who like fables and chimeras" (2:86–87). These remarks are followed by a sarcastic commentary on a Muslim rite in which fifteen-year-old female

virgins are sexually initiated by priests who then claim the sons for the priesthood: "But the priests, who undoubtedly choose only the prettiest [girls], almost always have the generosity to send them home with the hope of having another [child], which they [the girls] will be free to keep for themselves. Aren't they charitable? After all, it's only for the salvation of their souls, for if a girl had the misfortune not to observe the precept, she would be deprived of an eternity of bliss" (2:87–89).

The narrator's strong philosophic voice in this passage seems strangely out of keeping with the apologetic tone of the author's preface. *La Paysanne philosophe* was the first published of Robert's novels. The author presents herself as a feeble woman (the deprecatory "femelle" underlines the handicap of her sex) who offers the public her first work with much timidity:

> Dear reader, it's a female author who dares to introduce herself. If you receive these first fruits with favor, you will encourage her to use greater zeal and application in working toward improvement in order to earn your approbation. I flatter myself that you will grant my sex indulgence. I think that you should be appreciative of a woman who, instead of spending her leisure hours tying knots or criticizing her friends, applies herself to reading and writing. . . . I have never been known in what's called society, always cloistered as I have been in a small circle of friends. In their company I find lessons in wisdom. The desire to gain their love and to merit general esteem is my first preoccupation. The desire to make myself useful has inspired in me the love of learning; this is the way I avoid boredom, the ordinary companion of idleness. You will decide, dear reader, by this sample if I am worthy of pursuing a career that I begin atremble. It's up to you to judge; your approval will make the true success of this new Philosopher [nouvelle Philosophe]. (1:3–6)

In the original French, "nouvelle Philosophe," with its feminine modifier of the masculine noun, is a startling phrase. The philosophes known as such were overwhelmingly male. Robert's new philosopher is at once newly minted, hot off the press, and a novelty by virtue of her sex. What was the route, we wonder, from "Auteur femelle" to her creation, the "nouvelle Philosophe"? Is the neologism meant only for the title character, or also for the author?

A revelation at the beginning of the novel sheds light on these questions. In the midst of philosophizing, about the relation of intel-

ligence to social status and the *préjugé* that accords the *grands* more intelligence than others, she makes a bow to her benefactor, one of those nobles truly admirable for their virtue and their learning. It was he, she says, who made her what she is:

> It is to one of these men, through his kindness and attentiveness in instructing me, that I owe the little knowledge that I've acquired. . . . He created me a second time, since through his zealous charity and desire to spread happiness he finally raised me up from nothing, where I would have remained without his generous help. In a word, it's he who gave me a new being in making me what I am. It is in part to express my gratitude to him that I have undertaken to write my adventures. It will suffice to give my sex some examples that may inspire them with a love of virtue and a hatred of vice. (1:18–19)

This man, as we later learn, is the Count, Flore's future husband. Founder of her philosophy, of her text, and of her very being, he is the sine qua non of the novel. Without him, there would not only be no marriage plot, there would be no plot at all, for there would be no narrator. He is the original philosophe, as he is called in the text (for example, 1:45), on which the "nouvelle Philosophe" is dependent.

There is a lack of clarity here surrounding narrative and authorial voice. For whether the nouvelle Philosophe is either author or authored, she is still dependent on a philosophe for her being. This philosophe founds the text without which Flore would not be narrator and Robert would not be author.

Nicole de Beauvais

The textual and sexual dependency of *La Paysanne philosophe* is absent from Robert's later *Nicole de Beauvais*. *Nicole de Beauvais* is like a revision of Flore's story. It recuperates for the heroine the autonomy that Flore was denied.

The novel has no preface. It begins by an astonishing announcement: Nicole, like Jacob in Marivaux's *Le Paysan parvenu*, has no last name. For a female protagonist, the omission is an even more dramatic repudiation of the father. The narrator informs us that the "de Beauvais" (from the name of a town in Nicole's province) was added by the "editor" for the purposes of identification. This assertion of female autonomy persists throughout the novel.

Like Flore, the orphaned Nicole is plagued by undesirable suitors and abductions. Unlike Flore, she stays in her village long enough to have a tragic childhood romance, for the boy later dies. This episode becomes a focal point of her Rousseauean nostalgia for simpler, happier times. The contrast between her candor and the sophistication, if not duplicity, of the fashionable people whose world she enters serves as the background for reflections on class prejudice and the force of nature not unlike those found in *La Paysanne philosophe*. A baron who becomes Nicole's fiancé without knowledge of her humble birth says, for example, that she has an "air of ease and nobility."[23] The narrator adds that "she owed part of her gifts to nature alone; she owed her talents to friendship, her knowledge to love" (2:53).

Despite the heroine's unswerving loyalty to her ideals and attachment to her place of origin (whose image loses some of its nostalgic glow in a return visit), the narrator raises our expectations of a dénouement similar to that of the earlier novel. A Madame de Varlon claims that Nicole is her daughter, but the claim turns out to be false. Nicole's engagement to the Baron, who does love her in his way, seems to assure her of security, social status, and happiness. Yet finally Nicole breaks off the engagement, repelled by her fiancé's outbursts of irrational jealousy. Moreover, she decides not to marry at all: "I renounce the power of love forever" (2:216).

In one move, this "refusal of love" quashes both the marriage plot and the social mobility plot. Only by "marrying up," as Flore did, could Nicole have changed her social status. Although she has acquired aristocratic friends, she remains essentially what she always was: an unpretentious girl from the provinces. At the novel's close we learn that she will devote herself entirely to the tendre amitié that represented autonomy for so many of her seventeenth-century forebears: "Her heart, detached from all passion, was devoted entirely to tender friendship" (2:298–99). Our final image of her is one of resolute autonomy: "Nicole de Beauvais, surrounded by objects worthy of her gratitude, respect, and all her tenderness, enjoys pure pleasures untroubled by remorse. Far from resembling those *grands* who are poor in the midst of abundance and sad in the midst of pleasure, she enjoys unmixed pleasure and she shares her good fortune with those who have been plunged into poverty by unexpected misfortune (2:300).

23. [Marie Anne de Roumier Robert], *Nicole de Beauvais, ou l'amour vaincu par la reconnaissance*, 2 vols. (The Hague and Paris: Desaint, Despilly, La Veuve Duchesne, Cellot, Pankoucke, Delalain, 1767), 2:53. Further references to this novel will be found in parentheses in the text.

The notice in Fréron's *Année Littéraire* gives some indication of the incomprehension with which such an unorthodox plot was met. The reviewer advised that Robert would have done better to end the novel with her protagonists' "happiness," an ending that would have been "simpler and more satisfying."[24] The happiness of female autonomy seems to have escaped the reviewer's attention, although Robert could not have been clearer about her heroine's ultimate contentment.

The philosophic discourse on social class and nature that was integral to *La Paysanne philosophe* remains more or less unchanged in the later novel. Here, however, it no longer supports the plot. Several of the characters speak for a democratic love, like that of Flore and the Count, which transcends social barriers. Madame de Varlon, when she thinks she is secure in the love of a man who later deserts her, says: "Why . . . have we been given such a frightful picture of love? Isn't it the purest and sweetest instinct in nature? It is what stirs great souls, what ennobles their sentiments, what expands their being in raising them above themselves" (1:180). It is just this image of love that the novel deconstructs. Nicole is lowered, rather than uplifted, by the Baron's mad jealousy. And there is much irony to a character's comment on the engagement of Nicole and the Baron: "It's only in answering the claims of nature that we can find happiness. Those who have constrained it by so many civil laws have cared more about the appearance of order than about happiness in marriage" (2:108). Nicole answered such "claims of nature" only with a social equal, the dead peasant boy.

In *Nicole de Beauvais* the disjunction between feminine autonomy and philosophic discourse makes apparent the central dilemma of Marie Anne de Roumier Robert's writing: how can one be both a *femme* and a *philosophe*? *Nouvelles philosophes*, like Mirka and Flore, lose their identity. The condition for a strong female identity, such as Nicole's, is apparently not to be a philosophe. Only in the women's culture of Castora, where the masculine philosophic model has no force, do we glimpse the possible flourishing of women's minds. But Castora is nowhere.

Emilie du Châtelet: "If I were a man . . ."

Emilie du Châtelet has commonly been thought of as an opponent of Cartesianism. She has been seen as sharing the anti-Cartesian commitment of Voltaire, her companion of some sixteen years, to the

24. Fréron, *L'Année Littéraire* (1766), 8:350.

Newtonian cause. In a letter of 1738 to Maupertuis, the academician who was her chosen mentor, she says, "Really, Monsieur de Voltaire and you ought to get together and crush Cartesianism."[25]

By 1738 du Châtelet had already settled into her husband's country estate of Cirey with Voltaire, where her husband gallantly acquiesced to a ménage à trois.[26] Although it may have taken a certain insouciance for Emilie du Châtelet to go off with her lover, she never forgot her obligations as a wife and mother. Her *Institutions de physique* (Lessons in Physics) (1740), which she was composing at the time of her letter to Maupertuis, were ostensibly written for her young son, who was thirteen when the work appeared.

The letter of 1738 contrasts markedly with flattering comments on Descartes in du Châtelet's *Institutions*, a work devoted in large part to an exposition of Newtonian physics. This paradox is less an indication of the type of ambivalence that we've seen in Marie Anne de Roumier Robert and the seventeenth-century cartésiennes than it is a locus for the contradictions of du Châtelet's position as the most "philosophe" of the women discussed in this chapter. Her position on Descartes, both idiosyncratic and typical, is emblematic of her precarious intellectual status as a woman in the philosophic circles of her time. It is just one instance of her difficulty in using Enlightenment discourse.

In the *Institutions*, du Châtelet took on the Herculean task of integrating Cartesian, Newtonian, and Leibnizian philosophy. Although similar efforts were made by others at about this time, du Châtelet's work has a distinctive cast. The scientific aspect of her project was marred by her failure to join her colleagues in concluding that both the Leibnizian and Newtonian measures of force were correct.[27] The interest of the *Institutions* lies elsewhere. Du Châtelet was seeking the

25. [Du Châtelet], *Les Lettres de la Marquise du Châtelet*, ed. Theodore Besterman (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1958), 132, 7 July 1738. Hereafter the Besterman (Best.) number and date will be given in parentheses in the text following references to du Châtelet's letters.

26. I will not review the well-known facts of du Châtelet's life here, except insofar as they may be relevant to the discussion of her work. In recent years, several biographies have appeared: Elisabeth Badinter, *Emilie, Emilie: L'Ambition féminine au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983); Esther Ehrman, *Mme du Châtelet: Scientist, Philosopher, and Feminist of the Enlightenment* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986); and René Vaillot, *Madame du Châtelet* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978).

27. See Carolyn Iltis, "Madame du Châtelet's Metaphysics and Mechanics," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 8:1 (1977): 29–48. Iltis notes similar integrative attempts among such mid-eighteenth-century thinkers as d'Alembert, Desaguliers, Boscovich, and Reid.

philosophical coherence of a world view that had begun to disappear with the increasing specializations in natural philosophy and the separation of philosophy and theology. In Descartes's work she found a modern philosophical system (albeit in her opinion flawed) in which the mechanical world made sense in a metaphysical context.

In the *Avant-propos*, du Châtelet credits Descartes with a pioneering role in the Enlightenment's task of clearing away scholastic obscurantism: "Until the last century, the Sciences were an impenetrable secret into which only alleged Savants were initiated. It was a kind of cabal whose code consisted of barbaric words that seemed to be invented to obscure and discourage the mind."[28] Descartes, she says, "appeared in this profound darkness like a Star who came to illuminate the universe." Moreover, it's to him that "human reason owes the most." She goes on to praise his *Geometry*, *Optics*, and *Discourse on Method* as "masterpieces of wisdom which will immortalize his name." "If he erred on several points in physics, it is because he was a man, and it is not possible for only one man or one century to know everything" (Avant-propos, sect. V). Her Descartes becomes a commonplace figure of progress: "We rise to the knowledge of truth like those Giants who scaled the heavens by climbing on one another's shoulders. It is Descartes and Galileo who formed the Huygens and the Leibnizes . . . and it is by profiting from Kepler's work and by using Huygens's Theorems that Mr. Newton discovered the universal natural law according to which the Planets revolve around the Sun and there is gravity on earth" (Avant-propos, sect. V).

Du Châtelet's praise reveals both her desire to give Descartes his due in the history of philosophical thought and the importance he had for her own work. Although in the *Institutions* as in her other writings she makes little reference to gender, her emphasis on Descartes's clarity and accessibility reminds us of the initial appeal of the seventeenth-century philosopher for women. Du Châtelet's desire for Cartesian clarity is reflected in the *Institutions*, one of the many eighteenth-century works of "popularization" of science which Aram Vartanian has seen as direct descendants of Descartes's project to open natural philosophy to a broad public through the application of his method.[29]

28. Gabrielle-Emilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, Marquise du Châtelet, *Institutions physiques de Madame la marquise du Chastellet addressées à Mr. son fils* (Amsterdam: Aux Dépens de la Compagnie, 1742; reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1988, in Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 28, part 3), Avant-propos, V. Hereafter references to this work will be by section numbers given in parentheses in the text.

29. Aram Vartanian, *Diderot and Descartes: A Study of Scientific Naturalism in the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 22–25.

Why then the intensity of du Châtelet's desire to "crush" Cartesianism? The incompatibility of Cartesian and Newtonian physics will not suffice to explain the her militancy. By the eighteenth century, the Christian apologetic strain in Descartes's writings had facilitated a curious alliance between Cartesian philosophy and the church. Acceptance by Jansensists and such churchmen as Bossuet and Fénelon had helped to forge this alliance.[30] Cartesianism had become so entrenched in the Académie des Sciences that by the time that du Châtelet was engaged in writing the *Institutions*, Maupertuis as a Newtonian was a striking exception among reputable men of science.[31] The philosophes who adopted Newtonianism in the 1730s and 1740s felt themselves called to a mission not dissimilar to that of the Cartesians a century earlier. The Newtonians were the forces of

30. Ibid., 36–40.

31. See Linda Gardiner, "Emilie du Châtelet" (unpublished ms., 1984), chap. 4, 14. I owe a very large debt to Linda Gardiner in this section. Her superb work on Emilie du Châtelet has been an invaluable guide. I am extremely grateful to her for her generosity in making available to me her manuscript study of du Châtelet and her copy of du Châtelet's manuscript versions of the *Institutions de physique*. My thanks also to Rebecca Elson for our stimulating and helpful discussions on du Châtelet. Margaret Jacob informs us that "by the 1740s, when Newtonian mechanics had captured the educational system in England, in Scotland, and at the major Dutch universities, the French colleges continued to teach Descartes relentlessly." See Margaret C. Jacob, *The Cultural Meaning of the Scientific Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 67. Jacob reproduces an engraving titled "The Truth Sought by Philosophers" in which the figure of Descartes, led by an allegorized Truth, is at the head of a line of philosophers from classical antiquity. Later eighteenth-century copies of the engraving replace Descartes by Newton (Jacob, 62). Rupert Hall makes an important distinction between the acceptance of Newton's experimental work in France and acceptance of his theoretical principles of natural philosophy. Hall shows that by 1720 some important and powerful men of science in France had admired in particular the *Opticks* and had accepted the experimental work of Newton, who in 1699 had been chosen as an *associé étranger* of the Académie des Sciences. Nevertheless, as Hall points out, such limited acceptance did not make one into a "Newtonian," or supporter of Newton's scientific concepts and theory. See A. Rupert Hall, "Newton in France: A New View," *History of Science* 13 (December 1975): 233–50. J. H. Brumfitt remarks: "By 1700, Cartesianism had almost become the official philosophy of France." See J. H. Brumfitt, *The French Enlightenment* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 31. In his discussion of eighteenth-century Cartesianism, 27–43, he shows the simultaneous decline of Cartesianism(s) and its absorption into the philosophy of Newton and Locke. According to Richard A. Watson, Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology had become displaced by 1712, but Watson acknowledges that other aspects of Cartesianism and a broader Cartesian philosophical heritage lived on. See Richard A. Watson, *The Downfall of Cartesianism, 1673–1712: A Study of Epistemological Issues in Late 17th-Century Cartesianism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), esp. 5.

light and progress against what had come to seem like the darkness of intolerant orthodoxy.[32]

It is well known, however, that Christian apologetics tells only half the Cartesian story. Descartes's rationality and methodical doubt, which in 1663 earned him a place on the Index, had by the beginning of the eighteenth century become amalgamated with freethinking and skepticism.[33] Du Châtelet, who had little use for revealed religion, is heir to this development. Her cautionary remarks to her son in the Avant-propos of the *Institutions* fairly breathe the liberating atmosphere of the Cartesian campaign against préjugés: "I want . . . you to put to good use the dawn of your reason, and I will try to protect you from the ignorance that is still only too common among people of your rank" (Avant-propos, sect. I). "What pains and care we take daily in the uncertain hope of obtaining honors and wealth for our children! Are knowledge of truth and the habit of seeking and following it an object any the less worthy of my care, especially in an age when the taste for natural philosophy has entered all ranks and has begun to be a part of knowledge of the world?" (Avant-propos, sect. IV).

The impact of Descartes's message of accessibility on du Châtelet is nonetheless difficult to ascertain. Her allusion to the nobility's notorious distaste for learning should not deceive us into reading these comments as a plea for the democratization of education. The contradictions of gender and class intervened in her implementation of a Cartesian ideal of accessibility. The pride that she took in her noble rank belongs to the intellectual and social elitism commonly found in her circle. Although her own concrete efforts at self-education and the few comments on the subject that she makes elsewhere reveal a sympathy for the cause of female education, the fact remains that she neglected her daughter's education in favor of her son's.[34]

Descartes's more concrete contribution to the project of the *Institutions* was the model that he provided for systematizing the relation of

32. Cf. Linda Gardiner Janik, "Searching for the Metaphysics of Science: the Structure and Composition of Madame du Châtelet's *Institutions de physique*, 1737–1740," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 201 (1982), 87. It's ironic that a decade or two later, according to Margaret Jacob's thesis, the "Newtonian Enlightenment" had become the established one. See Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

33. See Vartanian, *Diderot and Descartes*, 6–7.

34. See Gardiner, "Emilie du Châtelet," chap. 3:32.

metaphysics to physics. A major preoccupation of both du Châtelet and Voltaire at Cirey in the 1730s was to establish a metaphysical ground for physics,[35] and a metaphysical question may have been the initial stimulus for du Châtelet's treatise.[36] In a letter to Maupertuis of April 1738, she expresses her concern that Leibniz's concept of the constant quantity of force in the universe may restrict free will by restricting the freedom to initiate motion (Best. 122). The issue of free will in turn was inseparable from questions on the nature of God. Moreover, Newtonian mechanics left du Châtelet without an explanation of the necessity of the physical world that it describes. She used Fontenelle's image of the opera to criticize Newtonian attraction on this count (sect. 153).[37]

Du Châtelet opted for Leibnizian dynamics anyway. In metaphysics she allied herself with the Leibnizian intellectualist position based on an omniscient God who has no need to intervene in the universe that is the result of his wisdom. She rejected the Newtonian voluntarist position that the universe depends on God's active intervention for its continued existence.[38] The introductory chapters of the *Institutions* are given over to an exposition of Leibnizian metaphysics (via Christian von Wolff, Leibniz's great disciple), which was to serve as the ground for her Newtonian-Leibnizian physics. Linda Gardiner Janik sees du Châtelet's successive revisions of the *Institutions* as tending toward a synthesis of Leibnizian metaphysics and Newtonian physics. Janik argues that the author of the *Institutions* needed the metaphysical foundation that she chose because she was unwilling to follow Voltaire in his conceptual leap from inexplicable phenomena in the natural world to God's will.[39]

Du Châtelet's attempt to present a systematic natural philosophy, comprising both physics and metaphysics, distinguishes her project from Voltaire's *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* (Rudiments of Newton's Philosophy) (1738–40), which was written during the same peri-

35. See Ira O. Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 278.

36. Iltis, "Du Châtelet's Metaphysics," 31–32.

37. See Jean Erhard, *L'Idée de nature en France dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963), 150.

38. For a clear exposition of the Newton-Leibniz debates, particularly on intellectualist versus the voluntarist concepts of God, see Carolyn Itis, "The Leibnizian-Newtonian Debates: Natural Philosophy and Social Psychology," *British Journal for the History of Science* 6 (December 1973): 343–77.

39. See Janik's excellent discussion in her "Searching for the Metaphysics of Science." On the disagreement with Voltaire, see 91.

od of intense philosophical inquiry at Cirey. As Ira O. Wade has observed, the section on metaphysics which Voltaire added in 1740 is much less rigorous than the introductory chapters of the *Institutions*.[40] Voltaire's preferences are clearly Newtonian, but he gives his reader a smattering of the great philosophers: Newton, Leibniz, Locke, Malebranche, and Descartes, among others. He can be chattily anecdotal, as in his discussion of cannibalism as an example of natural law.[41] In contrast, du Châtelet presents her fundamental metaphysical categories as so many building blocks for her physical categories.

The connection between metaphysics and physics was hardly severed in the eighteenth century. Newton is a prime example of the ways in which theology and metaphysics could infiltrate physics.[42] But the relation tended to be fairly loose and unreflective, especially as deism gained ground. It is one thing to see the physical universe as dependent on God's power and glory, but quite another to seek a systematic account of the interrelations between the physical universe and first principles.

Although Descartes set a precedent in this attempt, du Châtelet found neither his physics nor his metaphysics satisfactory. She criticizes him for the lack of clarity in his "clear and distinct ideas" which led him to omit inertia and active force ("force active") from his concept of extension (sect. 2). Whereas in his *Traité de métaphysique* (Treatise on Metaphysics), Voltaire condemned Descartes for hypothesizing, du Châtelet departed from the Newtonian attack on hypothesis in her guarded admission of its utility.[43] It is noteworthy that the chapter devoted to hypotheses does not lean on Wolff's *Ontologia*, as do most of the other introductory chapters on metaphysics.[44] Al-

40. Wade, *Intellectual Development*, 278.

41. Voltaire, *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Moland (Paris: Garnier, 1879), 22:420–21.

42. Erhard, *Idée de nature*, 127–29. See also Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 81–84, and Janik, "Searching," 106–7. Burtt's highly important discussion of Newton's metaphysics rests on a concept of metaphysics which is more closely akin to what today we might call a world view, or ideology. Much of the metaphysical theater in which Newton presented his concepts of physics was unreflected and nonconscious. See Edwin Arthur Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*, rev. ed. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980), 207–302. Alain Niderst remarks that for Fontenelle and the Cartesians of his time, physics was always grounded in metaphysics but in a metaphysics composed of only a few basic principles. See Alain Niderst, "Fontenelle et la science de son temps," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 228 (1984): 17.

43. See Janik, "Searching," 92–93.

44. See W. H. Barber, *Leibniz in France from Arnauld to Voltaire: A Study in French Reactions to Leibnizianism, 1670–1760* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955).

though du Châtelet was not alone in her effort to synthesize Cartesian and later philosophy, her independence of thought on Descartes is evident here. She cites him as an example of both the value and the danger of scientific hypothesis, which has a certain practical and theoretical use but can also lead to the kinds of "fictions" that Newton wanted to avoid (sects. 53–55).[45] She rejects the way in which he moved from the phenomenal to the causal: it is not God, she maintains against him, but motive force (force motrice,) that causes changes in matter (sects. 139–41).

As Janik has shown, du Châtelet found a satisfactory connection between physics and metaphysics in the Leibnizian and Wolffian notion of sufficient reason. Its corollary, the principle of contradiction (a true statement cannot be both affirmed and denied), and its setting, the wisdom of Leibniz's omniscient God, provided her with the transition that she sought from the empirical to the rational. If our answer to the "why of things" lies in sufficient reason for their existence, search for an ultimate cause becomes superfluous. Phenomena, she says, should be explained as much as is possible mechanistically, that is, by matter and movement. Beyond this explanation, we can't look to the will of the clockmaker to explain the workings of the clock. All we can do is find sufficient reason why it would not work otherwise (sects. 162–64).

Du Châtelet's adoption of this solution clarifies her position on Descartes. Consistent with her refusal to jump from the world of natural phenomena to God's will as a causal principle was her implicit denial of Descartes's alternative to a world whose reality was deprived of God's guarantee. Sufficient reason gave her a bulwark against Descartes's *malin génie*, the evil spirit responsible for massive deception about the world, who was conjured away by the cogito and the proof of God. To the question posed by Descartes in his *Discourse* and *Meditations* about how we can distinguish reality from a dream, du Châtelet responds that dreams violate the principle of sufficient reason, which is operative only in the real world:

> I dream that I'm in my room writing. All of a sudden my chair is changed into a winged horse, and in a flash I find myself at a hundred leagues from the place where I was, and with people who are long since dead. All this can't happen in this world, since there

45. On Newton's aversion to hypothesis, see Burtt, *Metaphysical Foundations*, 215–20.

> would be no sufficient reason for all these effects. For when I leave my room I can say how and why I leave, and I don't go from one place to another without passing through intermediary places. However, all these chimeras would be equally possible if there could be effects without sufficient reason. This is the principle that distinguishes dream from waking and the real world from the fabulous one that is depicted in Fairy Tales. (sect. 8)

Descartes's "clear and distinct ideas" were unacceptable to du Châtelet for a variety of reasons. They oversimplifed the concept of extension, and they relied on personal intuition rather than on proof (sect. 2).[46] Du Châtelet redirects the first rule of Descartes's method, pointing it more in the direction of the rational and the mathematically verifiable: "It is necessary to substitute proofs for the illusions of the imagination and to accept nothing as true but what can be indisputably deduced from first principles that no one can call into question, and to reject as false everything contrary to those principles" (sect. 2). In metaphysics she replaces the Cartesian idea of God as first causal principle by Leibnizian sufficient reason, while in physics she replaces Descartes by Newtonian mechanical principles and Leibnizian dynamics.

On the relation of mind to matter, Du Châtelet also evinces an independent attitude, yet one that retains a link to Descartes. She rejects the possibility that thought is an attribute of matter, because it doesn't square with her Leibnizian doctrine of essences and the incommunicability of attributes (sect. 47). She stood outside the intellectual current of materialist monism, the long line of thought that ran from Descartes's animal-machine to La Mettrie's "man-machine." She was certainly not a Cartesian dualist, yet the fact that she salvaged the autonomy of mind is suggestive. Perhaps her rejection of monism was motivated not only by her affiliation with Leibnizian thought, but also by distant echoes of the old slogan "the mind has no sex." It is intriguing that in some very sketchy notes on Descartes which she probably took in preparation for her *Institutions*, she briefly summarizes his dualism without comment and reserves her sharpest criticisms for his vortices and his theory of motion.[47]

46. In a manuscript draft of this passage, there is no criticism of Descartes's concept of extension. Bibliothèque Nationale Fonds français 12266, fols. 38–38r.

47. Emilie du Châtelet, "Descartes," Voltaire Collection, Leningrad Public Library, 9:122r-124v. In these papers, du Châtelet also criticizes Fontenelle for his Cartesianism and for his rejection of the Newtonian theory of gravity in his *Eloges*. I am very grateful

The variant in the Avant-propos of Newton's dictum about standing on the shoulders of giants suggests that inevitably there was a Cartesian substratum to du Châtelet's philosophical work. Without Descartes's physics there would have been no mechanism; without his metaphysics there would have been no precedent for a union of the phenomenal and the rational. The integrality of Descartes to her project is suggested by what is almost certainly his likeness in a triumvirate of frame portraits in the engraved frontispiece to the 1740 edition. Along with two other men who appear to be Leibniz and Newton, he presides over a scene in which the sciences pay homage to Truth.[48] For du Châtelet, Descartes was not the leader of an opposing camp, but rather a major contributor to the scientific progress that was a cornerstone of philosophic faith. In its double debt to Descartes, the *Institutions de physique* offers as much continunity as discontinuity between Cartesians and Newtonians.

Historical accounts of du Châtelet's intellectual activity have created the impression that it was nurtured by the (male) circle of intellectuals at Cirey. Although it is true that discussion with Voltaire in particular was indispensable to her at the time that she was composing her *Institutions*, such accounts leave out the fact of du Châtelet's intellectual isolation. She appears to have withheld the fact that she was working on the *Institutions* even from Voltaire.[49] Her philosophical efforts were met with reactions that ranged from incomprehension to thinly veiled mockery. It was in thanks for a copy of the *Institutions* that du Châtelet's friend, Pierre Robert Le Cornier de Cideville wrote her: "Reader, open this learned book; / For you physics will drop its savage air, / And you will guess from its charming

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to the Leningrad Public Library for sending me photocopies of these papers. To my knowledge they have not been published. The only reference to them that I have seen is in Ira O. Wade, *Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet: An Essay on the Intellectual Activity at Cirey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 24.

48. Because the engraving is unsigned, I have not been able to make an absolutely positive identification of the three men. However, the content of the *Institutions* and comparison with contemporary engraved portraits of Descartes, Leibniz, and Newton make my identification reasonably certain. I am grateful to Richard Wendorf and Marjorie Cohn for their help and advice in the matter of this engraving. Londa Schiebinger tentatively identifies the three men as Descartes, Newton, and Copernicus, although there is no iconographic or textual reason for the choice of Copernicus. See Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 130–31.

49. See William H. Barber, "Mme du Châtelet and Leibnizianism: The Genesis of the *Institutions de physique*," in *The Age of Enlightenment: Studies Presented to Theodore Besterman*, ed. W. H. Barber et al. (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), 212.

language / That Venus is your teacher."[50] Earlier he had written her: "Yours is a masculine mind, / But from your style of writing / I believe you're of the feminine kind."[51]

With the *Institutions* and her earlier *Dissertation sur la nature et la propagation du feu* (Essay on the Nature and Propagation of Fire), du Châtelet had entered the intellectual world of men. In both cases she proceeded with caution, keeping her writing a secret.[52] In submitting her essay on fire to the Académie des Sciences, she was competing for their prize with Voltaire and other men. (Both she and Voltaire won honorable mention. In 1739 the Academy printed three hundred copies of her essay in a limited edition. It was reprinted in 1744.) De Cideville's well-intentioned verses illustrate the problematics of the femme philosophe. No matter how philosophical her text, it seems that it was impossible for her to transcend her gender.

De Cideville's is an interesting misreading of du Châtelet. His implication is that she has managed to coat the pill of natural philosophy with charm. She herself was unfriendly to the tradition of popularization, however much she may in fact have belonged to it. She looked askance at the popularizing tendencies of both Fontenelle's *Entretiens* and the work of his imitator, Francesco Algarotti, *Il Neutonianismo per le dame* (Newtonianism for the Ladies) (1737; French trans., 1738). Of Algarotti's six dialogues with an imaginary marquise, she wrote to Maupertuis: "His book is frivolous; he apes Fontenelle" (Best. 139, 1 September 1738). Her remarks to Maupertuis about Voltaire's *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* (1738), on which she collaborated,[53] are even more revealing:

> There's a wisecrack in the beginning about imaginary marquises which neither M. Fontenelle nor M. Algarotti will like. He had removed it from the French edition, and I don't know how it slipped into the Dutch one. I don't think you'll dislike it; I know that you don't like the way those gentlemen overload truth with baubles. They say that M. Algarotti's book is called "Newtonianism for the

50. From a letter of 19 February 1741, as cited in Besterman's edition of du Châtelet's *Lettres*, 2:42. In the original French the verses are as follows: "Lecteur, ouvrez ce docte écrit; / La physique pour vous quitte son air sauvage, / Et vous devinerez à son charmant langage / Que c'est Vénus qui vous instruit."

51. From a letter of April 1735, as cited in the Besterman edition of du Châtelet's *Lettres*, 1:61.

52. Later, she also worked in secret on her translation of Newton's *Principia Mathematica*. See her letter of 12 November 1745 to François Jacquier (Best. 347).

53. See Janik, "Searching," 87–88, and Wade, *Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet*, 36–40.

> Ladies" [*Le Neutonisme* [*sic*] *à la portée des dames*]. What I see in his work is some joking about light. I don't know what kind of joke he will find to make about the inverse ratio of the square of distances. . . . M. de Voltaire is very angry that the Dutch publishers added to the title of his *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* "for everyone" [mis à la portée de tout le monde]. (Best. 124, 9 May 1738)

Du Châtelet saw her *Institutions* not so much as a physics without tears as a summary of the best work in the field to date: "Although we have several excellent Books of Physics in French, we have no complete Physics, unless you count [Jacques] Rohault's little Treatise, written eighty years ago. But that Treatise, although quite good for the time in which it was composed, is inadequate now because of the many discoveries made since" (Avant-propos, sect. III). She saw one of her tasks as bringing physics up to date (Rohault was a Cartesian). This task took her beyond the modest function of compiler to the broader philosophical project of finding an appropriately timely metaphysical foundation for what she considered the most important recent work in scientific theory. Her appreciation of the Cartesian heritage of clarity was only one sign that she wanted her work to be accessible, but she wasn't going to compromise in the direction of "baubles" and coated pills.

These goals distanced her from both Fontenelle and Algarotti. Her father, like Robert's, had entertained Fontenelle in his home during her childhood. As an adult she maintained a friendship with the old academician, but she was closer in age and interests to Algarotti. The Italian writer had visited her and Voltaire at Cirey in the fall of 1735 when he was working on his *Neutonianismo* and again in the fall of 1736, and all three had "Newtonized" together.[54] Algarotti's finished product features a marquise very much more like du Châtelet (who really was a marquise) than like Fontenelle's pupil, but even then, the fictional marquise resembles du Châtelet about as much as does de Cideville's Venus. At any rate, Algarotti was thinking of du Châtelet in the composition of his book; she was undoubtedly thinking of him in writing hers.

In the *Neutonianismo*, Algarotti acknowledged his double debt to Fontenelle and to Emilie du Châtelet with a dedication to the author

54. See Vaillot, *Madame du Châtelet*, 116–17. On Algarotti, see Ida Frances Treat, *Un Cosmopolite italien du XVIIIe siècle: Francesco Algarotti* (Trévoux: Jules Jeannin, 1913). For a brief anecdotal discussion of Algarotti's fortunes in England, see Patricia Phillips, *The Scientific Lady: A Social History of Women's Scientific Interests, 1520–1918* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 91–92.

of the *Entretiens* and a portrait of du Châtelet on the frontispiece. There is no doubt that the portrait flattered her vanity. In a postcript to her letter of 21 May 1738 (Best. 126), she asked Maupertuis if the likeness was good. She wanted the tribute, but perhaps she wanted more. To Algarotti she expressed her pleasure at the idea of the portrait: "You took a sketch of my face away with you. So I'll have the honor of being at the head of this work filled with wit, grace, imagination, and learning. I hope that by placing my portrait on the frontispiece you will let it be understood that I'm your marquise" (Best. 63, 20 April 1736). In a subsequent letter to Algarotti, she insists on the portrait, not without some petulance about the dedication to Fontenelle: "I warn you that I absolutely wish my portrait to be [in the book]. Settle your accounts as you will: M. de Fontenelle has more wit than I do, but I have a prettier face" (Best. 88, 11 January 1737). After publication she complained to Maupertuis about the dedication and insinuated that it was a cynical political move on Algarotti's part: "Next to his title, there's perhaps nothing so ridiculous as his dedication to a man who has always ridiculed the system of gravitation. I think he wanted to be in the Academy [of Sciences]" (Best. 124, 9 May 1738).

To Algarotti himself, the marquise of Cirey offered nothing but compliments, but there are many reasons why she would have been dissatisfied with his work. Their differing styles of accessibility went to the heart of the problem of gender for du Châtelet. What Emilie du Châtelet wanted and needed most for the development of her intellectual life was to be on the "inside," that is, in the midst of the scientific elite where the most exciting research was being done. This she as a woman could never do. There is an unspoken eloquence to the letters in which she asks Maupertuis to meet her at the closing of sessions at the Academy of Sciences, where she could go only for the public lectures. She had a vested interest in opening up scientific work to a larger public. Why then would she have objected to works of popularization?

A closer comparison with Algarotti will shed light on this issue. In thanking Maupertuis for answering some of her questions about gravity, du Châtelet expresses impatience at his use of unexplicated formulas, which tend to exclude the untutored: "I accept the brevity of your hieroglyphs, but they make the sciences into a secret, and it's in my interest that they be shared with the ignorant" (Best. 133, 17 July 1738). Algarotti had used similar language to praise Fontenelle for his leadership in the move toward popularization: "You were the first to

interpret to the most attractive half of the World those hieroglyphs that were formerly only for the initiated."[55] Modern physics itself, he says, is a model of clarity which "translates into popular language the obscure hieroglyphs of a learned language" (2: 177). To each his or her own hieroglyph. Algarotti, following Fontenelle here, informs his reader that he has banished "lines and figures" from his work because they would have made it seem too serious and would have scared off the ladies.[56] He also tried to avoid mathematical terms as much as possible (1:viii). Du Châtelet, on the other hand, didn't hesitate to guide her reader through the complexities of mathematical formulas. There are foldout plates of "lines and figures" at the end of her text (as there are in Voltaire's *Eléments*).

Du Châtelet's "hieroglyphs," the fact that she dedicated her treatise to her son, and her sober tone indicate that her ambition was not to "succeed in the boudoirs" (réussir aux toilettes), as she said disparagingly of Algarotti (Best. 139, 1 September 1738). It is more likely that she thought of herself as a successor to Rohault in the Cartesian enterprise of writing serious but comprehensible philosophy. Her stated goal was not to convert her public to the party of philosophy, as Fontenelle wished to do, but rather to add to the stock of knowledge in a collective search for truth. She wanted her son to remain above the "partisan spirit" that had made the dispute between Cartesians and Newtonians into "a kind of national affair" (Avant-propos, sect. VII). Her "hieroglyphs"—her formulas and proofs—were paradoxically a badge of membership in the club of philosophers, a sign that she had mastered the secrets that she could now share with her public.

Algarotti's marquise was in many respects a caricature of du Châtelet. In imitation of Fontenelle's, the Italian marquise undergoes a conversion experience. Superficially Algarotti's marquise follows du Châtelet's intellectual trajectory, the stages of which structure his dialogues. "I've put a kind of change or catastrophe in the opinions of my marquise," he explains. First she's a Cartesian, then she follows

55. [Francesco] Algarotti, *Le Newtonianisme pour les dames, ou entretiens sur la lumiere, sur les couleurs, et sur l'attraction*, trans. Du Perron de Castera, 2 vols. in 1 (Amsterdam: Aux dépens de la Compagnie, 1741), 1:iv. Further references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.

56. Cf. [Bernard Le Bovier de] Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, ed. Alexandre Calame (Paris: Didier, 1966), 32–33. The Marquise refuses to let the Philosopher draw a diagram of the zodiac on the sand of her park because she doesn't want her grounds to have a "scholarly look."

Malebranche, and finally she's "forced to embrace the System of the Man [Newton], *who should be at the head of the Human Race, if the superiority of genius and learning decided superiority in rank*" (1:ix).[57] In reality, du Châtelet was not "converted" to the cause of Newtonianism. The word is arguably more applicable to her embrace of Leibnizian and Wolffian metaphysics, but this phase of her career almost certainly postdated the publication of Algarotti's book.[58] It was surely not Voltaire who would have converted her. Both Linda Gardiner and Ira O. Wade have shown that in the matter of Newtonian physics du Châtelet was more likely to have influenced Voltaire than the other way around.[59] If any male mentor played philosopher to her marquise, it was Maupertuis, but, as it happened, he wasn't much of a mentor.[60] Du Châtelet repeatedly tried to enlist his services as tutor and consultant, but she was never able to get as much out of him as she would have liked. He was a busy man who had better things to do. Partly out of necessity, she embarked on the better part of her adult education unaided.

Du Châtelet saw herself in a more equivocal relationship to her tutor of choice than that of docile pupil. She compared herself to both Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Queen Christina of Sweden. Before Maupertuis' imminent departure for the Arctic on the expedition to measure the earth's surface, she wrote him: "I don't know how the palatine princess [Elisabeth] adjusted to Descartes's voyage to Sweden, but I think that if he had had your merit she wouldn't so easily have ceded him to Christina. You make me see the difference between that queen and myself since you've preferred Sweden, where she is no longer, to Cirey where I am and wanted you to be" (Best. 69, 18

57. Michel Delon notes that Algarotti's translator tries in his own preface to attenuate the impact of this "conversion à la vérité," and so to rehabilitate Descartes, by making the fictional marquise's development seem more evolutionary. See Michel Delon, "La Marquise et le philosophe," *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, n.s. 182 (1981–82): 72.

58. According to Janik, "Searching," 93, du Châtelet began to read Wolff in March 1737. Wade came to think that du Châtelet had no sudden "conversion" to Leibniz's philosophy, but that from her earliest conception of the *Institutions* she had intended to write "a textbook on physics using Leibniz and Newton as the 'fond.'" Ira O. Wade, *Intellectual Development*, 284–85. Similarly, Barber contends that she was not "reconverted" to Newtonianism with her translation of the *Principia*. See Barber, "Madame du Châtelet," 213–22. Barber discounts Voltaire's assertions in his "Eloge historique de Madame la marquise du Châtelet" that du Châtelet finally renounced her Leibnizian ideas (220–21).

59. See Gardiner, "Emilie du Châtelet," and Wade, *Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet*.

60. Cf. Gardiner, "Emilie du Châtelet," chap. 2:31–33.

July 1736). Earlier she had written him that if she could get him to come to Cirey, she would be happier than Queen Christina: "She left her kingdom to run after alleged savants, and it will be in my own that I will assemble what she would have gone much farther than Rome to seek" (Best. 40, August 1735). It is significant that du Châtelet places herself in the tradition of only the most powerful of the "Cartesian women." Elisabeth and Christina in their enviable status of patron could command the attentions of their tutor as du Châtelet was unable to do with Maupertuis.

It is in the matter of power that Algarotti's portrait (unwittingly) most resembles du Châtelet. If Fontenelle's marquise was his literary model, du Châtelet could have been his living model for what he calls a "half-Philosophical woman" (femme à moitié Philosophe) (1:132). Algarotti's philosopher exerts much the same kind of intellectual power over his marquise as did Fontenelle's over his. As Fontenelle claimed to lead his marquise to the party of philosophy, Algarotti announces in his preface that he will take his pupil from the Cartesian vestibule into the "sanctuary" of Newtonian science (1:ix-x). By the beginning of the fourth *entretien*, she's ready to enter it (2:1–2). Presumably, then, the exposition of Newtonian optics and physics which follows takes place in the sanctuary. But just as Fontenelle's marquise never really enters the philosophic party, consigned as she is to her separate sphere, so in the end Algarotti's is denied the sanctuary.

Like du Châtelet, Algarotti's fictional marquise lacks the necessary intellectual training to be a member of the scientific priesthood. When she shows some hesitation over Newtonian gravitation, the philosopher tells her that she needs to be thoroughly convinced: "We would do both you and Newton's system a great wrong if we tried to offer it to you without good proof." He then proceeds to withhold this proof from her: "Besides, it's a shame that we can't expound the system to you with all the force of the demonstrations and calculations that accompany it. It will undoubtedly lose much in the process." "I'll be patient," the marquise replies. "Since I can't see gravitation in all the lustre a Mathematician does, I will be like those Amateurs who when they can't have a painting make do with a print. I hope that you will make it as much like the original as possible" (2: 153). Later the marquise will remind him that she is unable to "enter the sanctuary of Geometry" (2:222).

Algarotti's marquise, sweetly accepting her status as an amateur mathematician (curieux) is far from a convincing portrayal of du Châtelet. It was mathematics, and especially geometry, that du

Châtelet desperately wanted to conquer. As early as 1734, she was urging both Maupertuis and his friend Clairaut to tutor her. It was for her that Clairaut wrote his *Eléments de géométrie* (1741).[61] By 1739 she still hadn't made much headway. In that year she wrote to Frederick of Prussia: "I'm going to leave physics for a while for geometry. I've realized that I've gone a little too quickly; I'll have to backtrack. Geometry is the key to all the doors, and I'm going to work to acquire it" (Best. 193, 27 February 1739).

Du Châtelet never did learn geometry to her satisfaction. Even if she had, she would not have been admitted to that eighteenth-century sanctuary, the Académie Royale des Sciences. It's ironic that, like so many of the salon women of her day, she who could do nothing more than hover on the periphery of the Parisian academies wielded great influence in placing her male friends. She tried to lure Johann Bernoulli to Cirey with promises of a seat in the Académie des Sciences or in Frederick's Academy (Best. 227, 3 December 1739; Best. 255, 5 December 1740). To the duc de Richelieu she enumerated all the favors she had done for an ungrateful Voltaire, sadly remiss in his correspondence from abroad: "I've obtained for M. de Voltaire an honorable return to his own country, I've gotten him back the ministry's benevolence, I've opened the road to the academies for him" (Best. 253, 23 November 1740). In fact, whether or not it was due to du Châtelet's ministrations, Voltaire finally did get his seat in the Académie Française in 1746. Around the same time, du Châtelet was elected to the Bologna Institute. Her friend de Cideville sent his compliments with the relevant question: "Why is the fair sex, so greatly loved by us, / Excluded, in France, from the Academy?"[62]

Du Châtelet's exclusion from the French academic world is all the more ironic in light of the attention that she did receive from the Académie des Sciences: their publication of her *Dissertation sur la nature et la propagation du feu* in 1739 and her public dispute over living force (forces vives) with the secretary, Jean Jacques Dortous de Mairan. Both these unusual signs of recognition for a woman were, however, filled with vexations. The dispute with Mairan, a Cartesian, originated in a footnote to her essay on fire in which she was critical of his position on living force. The note was a sore point that keeps cropping up in her letters. It mortified her, for she felt that it betrayed her insufficient knowledge of the subject at the time. She pleaded

61. Vaillot, *Madame du Châtelet*, 96.
62. As quoted in Ehrman, *Mme du Châtelet*, 39.

again and again with Maupertuis to get the Academicians to suppress it in the published version. Her tone ranges from the pathetic to the peremptory: "It's sad to see in what will perhaps be my only published work a sentiment so opposed to my current thinking" (Best. 151, 19 November 1738). In the event, Maupertuis failed her, behaving not like a friend but like an academician. "When I appealed to you, Monsieur," she chides him, "for the changes I wanted to make in my essay on fire, I thought I was addressing a friend, not a judge of prizes" (ibid.).

If nothing else could have disenchanted her with the world of the philosophes, her frustration and disappointment with Maupertuis in this instance should certainly have done so. Yet it was not the only such episode. Her *Institutions de physique* embroiled her in still another dispute, a personal one this time with Johann Samuel Koenig, her Wolffian tutor who disclosed her authorship of the *Institutions* and spread rumors that she had plagiarized him. When her friend Clairaut actually proposed Koenig as a corresponding member of the Académie des Sciences, she wrote to Johann Bernoulli: "I've been told that if it had been possible to refuse him they would have done it, they're so full of indignation. Finally, Monsieur, everything that I've had to go through up to now proves to me that philosophes aren't any more gentlemanly (pas plus honnêtes gens) than anyone else" (Best. 229, 28 December 1739).

The affair of the note brought home to her all the disadvantages of her sex. After complaining to Maupertuis that Réaumur wouldn't agree to omit the note, she writes: "Life is so short and so filled with duties and useless detail when you have a family and a house that I hardly depart from my little plan of study to read recent books. I despair of my ignorance and of everything that prevents me from overcoming it. If I were a man, I'd be at Mount Valerian [site of his country home] with you, and I'd chuck all the useless things of my life. I love learning with a passion I've never had for society, but I've realized it too late" (Best. 148, 24 October 1738).

In the preface to her unfinished translation of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (dated 1735), du Châtelet lingers over the theme of women's disadvantages in education. It is perhaps the most extended statement that she made on gender. In very personal tones she muses that the lack of women's achievement in literature, history, and science is to be found in the préjugé that "excludes us so universally from learning."[63] Women's intellect, she says "seems in every way . . . like

63. Wade has published the translation in his *Studies on Voltaire, with Some Un-*

men's" (135). If she were king, she would "have women participate in all of humanity's rights, and especially in those of the mind." She herself, she reports, happened to come to know "gens de lettres" who took an interest in her and held her in some esteem. "Then I began to believe that I was a thinking creature." But society took up all her time and interest. "I have come to believe it seriously only at an age where enough time is left to become reasonable but not enough to acquire skills" (136). The remarks on her situation as a woman are by way of apology for her translation: "Nature having refused me the creative genius that discovers new truths, I have done justice to myself in limiting my work to rendering clearly what others have discovered" (136–37). A letter to de Cideville confirms her opinion of herself: "My occupations aren't worthy of communicating to you. God has refused me any kind of genius, and I spend my time clarifying truths that others have discovered" (Best. 198, 15 March 1739).

Here du Châtelet locates herself squarely in the tradition of women intellectuals' apologetics. We have seen a similar self-effacement combined with feminist overtones in the work of Claire-Marie de Saint-Chamond. Du Châtelet's female predecessors in scientific work often wrote of their contributions with the same mixture of personal diffidence and Cartesian egalitarianism. Marie Meurdrac wavered for two years before deciding to publish her *Chymie charitable et facile, en faveur des dames* (Chemistry Made Easy for the Ladies) (1666). She was afraid of incurring "general blame." Teaching is not a woman's profession, she told herself, and perhaps it was "above her" to publish. On the other hand, she reflected that "minds have no sex," and that if women were educated like men they could equal them.[64]

Jeanne Dumée prefaced her *Entretien sur l'opinion de Copernic* (A Discussion of Copernicus's Theory) with the statement: "It will perhaps be said that this work is too difficult for a person of my sex. I agree that I let myself be influenced by the ambition to work on material to which ladies of my time have not given thought. And even so much so as to let them know that they aren't incapable of study if they want to take the trouble to engage in it, since between the brain of a woman and that of a man there is no difference."[65] "Cartesian" to

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published Papers of Mme du Châtelet (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 131–87. See 135. Further references to this edition of the translation will appear in parentheses in the text.

64. [Marie] Meurdrac, *La Chymie charitable et facile, en faveur des dames* (Paris: Ruë des Billetes, et Rüe du Plastre, 1666), Avant-propos to Part I.

65. Jeanne Dumée, *Entretien sur l'opinion de Copernic touchant la mobilité de la terre* (Paris: La Veuve Bertrand, n.d.), ms. Bibliothèque Nationale Fonds français 19941. This

the extent that she calls Descartes "the most illustrious Philosopher of our times" (49–50), she displays embarrassment about her own work. Like du Châtelet in the *Institutions*, Dumée features the theory of others, confining her own contribution to an interesting, if not original, critical commentary. For example, she favors a Cartesian explanation of tides over the Galilean and Copernican (49–50).

How should we evaluate du Châtelet's belief that she was second-rate and not capable of producing original work? Janik has pointed out that Koenig's accusation of plagiarism might not have been completely off the mark, because du Châtelet did copy or translate material that he gave her.[66] She was not an innovator in metaphysics.[67] Yet although much of her scientific work consists of exposition or translation (she translated Newton's *Principia Mathematica*), Janik argues that her project in the *Institutions* of uniting science and metaphysics was indeed an innovation.[68]

Whatever our opinions of du Châtelet's achievement, it is certain that in her own estimation gender had worked against her. Was it because of the intense pressure she felt to catch up with her male colleagues that du Châtelet provided her son with the means to begin his education early in life? The Avant-propos of the *Institutions* leads us to believe that like many parents the author wanted to make sure that her son would have what she herself had lacked: "I've always thought that Men's most sacred duty was to give their Children an education that would prevent them when they were older from mourning their youth, which is the only time when you can truly learn." Later on, she says, "passions and pleasures" will take up all his time (Avant-propos, sect. I).

In her *Discours sur le bonheur* (Discourse on Happiness) (published posthumously in 1796), du Châtelet returned to a more personal reflection on gender and education. Like many of the philosophes, she stresses the positive value of the passions for human happiness. In an often quoted passage, she says that learning, because it doesn't ne-

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interesting manuscript is dedicated to Boucherat, who was named chancellor in 1685, yet the *Entretien* was reviewed in the *Journal des Sçavans*, 16 September 1680. The manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale is probably a later copy. Jean-François de la Croix mentions a printed quarto of 1680, but as far as I know, this edition has not been found. See [Jean-François de la Croix], *Dictionnaire portatif des femmes célèbres* rev. ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Belin, Volland, 1788), 1:569.

66. Janik, "Searching," 103. Cf. Ehrman, *Mme du Châtelet*, 34–35, and Vaillot, *Madame du Châtelet*, 184–85.

67. Janik, "Searching," 103. Cf. Iltis, "Du Châtelet's Metaphysics," 38.

68. Janik, "Searching," 109–10.

cessitate dependence on others, is "of all the passions the one that contributes to our happiness the most." Love of learning rests on a passion for *gloire*, and learning is "the only way for one half of the world to achieve it. It's precisely this half to whom upbringing removes the means." Women, she continues, need learning much more than men do, because they are excluded from every other road to gloire. A woman with "a sufficiently noble soul, has only learning to console her for all the exclusions and dependencies to which she by her condition is condemned."[69]

These statements are not without their serious contradictions. Gardiner sees the *Discours* as structured by a series of oppositional pairs, among them "autonomy/dependence" and "tranquillity/passion." Du Châtelet wanted the passions, which of all human faculties seem the least under our control, to make us independent. She attempted to overcome this paradox, according to Gardiner, by having the passions subject to the will.[70] There is a Cartesian strain to this thinking, in which will must dominate the passions in order for them to bring fulfillment. This solution, of very limited value in the matter of love, was equally unlikely to resolve the tensions of a "half-Philosophical woman." Nowhere in the *Discours* does du Châtelet acknowledge the depth of the contradiction between autonomy and dependence in female education. Her own experience revealed the futility of a search for autonomy through learning. For although she was able to amass a prodigious amount of learning on her own, she did have, as she says, the benefit of friends (however unreliable they may have proved) and parents who gave their daughter the freedom to read. Moreover, her incessant struggles to obtain tutoring and consultation from her friends show just how dependent she was on their expertise, as indeed are all scholars on one another.

A more curious contradiction in the *Discours* exposes the anomaly of du Châtelet's situation as a would-be philosophe. One source of happiness in the author's opinion is to be free of préjugés, and she writes: "it's up to us alone to rid ourselves of them. We all have enough mental faculties to examine things that people wish us to believe; to know, for example, if two and two make four or five; and

69. Madame du Châtelet, *Discours sur le bonheur*, ed. Robert Mauzi (Paris: Société d'Edition "Les Belles Lettres," 1961), 20. Mauzi dates the composition of the *Discours* between 1746 and 1748 (lxxiv-lxxxiv). Wade believes it was written closer to 1741. See his *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire*, 273. Further references to Mauzi's edition of the *Discours sur le bonheur* will be found in parentheses in the text.

70. Gardiner, "Emilie du Châtelet," chap. 10:10.

besides, in this age we are not lacking in help to educate ourselves" (10–11). Yet she made it plain that "we"—women—do lack help. Everything hinges on who is included in the universalizing "we" (*on*). She suggests that for the "one half of the world" excluded from formal education and the means to gloire, learning had to be a matter of self-help. The use of that deceptively impersonal pronoun *on* alongside her comments on the exclusion of women betrays the dilemma of the "half-philosophical" Emilie du Châtelet. So near yet so far to the "sanctuary," she takes her place next to the fictional marquises of Fontenelle and Algarotti.

For du Châtelet to have been fully a philosophe, as she was only too aware, she would have had to be a man. She could hardly conceal her disappointment when in 1740 Frederick of Prussia, a correspondent to whom she had sent her work, politely indicated that she was not to accompany Voltaire to his court (Best. 248, 8 September 1740). She had earlier written to Frederick a revealing letter about her relationship with Voltaire, comparing herself in effect to a man. In their differing opinions on Newton, she said, they exemplified Montaigne's ideal of friendship: "I don't know if Your Majesty has read a babbler named Montaigne, who in speaking of two men united by a true friendship said, 'they had everything in common, except their opinions and the secrets of others' " (Best. 237, 25 April 1740). Voltaire spoke similarly of their relationship, especially after the sexual passion had cooled. On his departure for Berlin in 1743, he wrote to their friend the count d'Argental: "I leave you Madame du Châtelet and Caesar [a reference to Voltaire's play, *La Mort de César*]; they are two great men."[71] After du Châtelet's death, he wrote to his niece and mistress, Marie Louise Denis: "I don't mourn a mistress, far from it. I mourn a friend and a great man."[72] And, in another letter to her: "My dear child, I have just lost a friend [un ami] of twenty years. You know that it's been a long time since I ceased to think of her as a woman, and I flatter myself that you will share my terrible pain."[73]

Emilie du Châtelet was one of those women who wanted it all. Unlike her seventeenth-century predecessors, she openly sought *both* love and learning. Like them, she ran into trouble in both areas. Her last letters to the man who became the great love of her final years,

71. Letter of 15 June 1743. In Voltaire, *The Complete Works*, ed. Theodore Besterman, 135 vols., (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, Les Délices, 1968–), 92 (VIII):376 (D2772).

72. Letter of 23 September 1749, in ibid., 95 (XI):168 (D4025).

73. Letter of 10 September 1749. As quoted in Vaillot, *Madame du Châtelet*, 317.

the writer Jean-François de Saint-Lambert, are filled with her searing conflict of loyalties between work and sexual passion. In the midst of ten-hour working days on her translation of the *Principia* (later her working hours would increase to eighteen), she wrote of her desperate love for him: "Newton is nothing to me, I can't apply myself" (Best. 226, 2 September 1748). In the end, it was perhaps both her work and her love that killed her, for she seems to have taken out little time for her health during the pregnancy with Saint-Lambert's child which resulted in her death.

The man's world of hard work and hard play left du Châtelet little room for the ideal of tendre amitié which still echoes in Robert's novels. Female friendship seems to have played a minor part in Emilie du Châtelet's life. The important friends and correspondents of her life were male. Her relationship to her mother was distant, her friendship with Françoise de Graffigny eroded by quarrels. It is interesting that her model for friendship was not de Scudéry but Montaigne, who found literary precedents for his close relationship with Etienne de la Boétie in the works of classical antiquity.

Ironically, her closest male friend's final public judgment of her has a certain trivializing tone. In his "Eloge historique de Madame la marquise du Châtelet" (Historical Eulogy of Madame la Marquise du Châtelet) (1752), Voltaire harks back to the seventeenth century in treating her as a femme savante. "There was never a woman as learned as she," he says, "and never did anyone merit less to have said of her, 'She is a learned lady.' She never spoke of intellectual matters [*science*] unless with persons she felt could instruct her, and she never spoke of them to draw attention to herself. She did not gather about her those circles where battles of wit take place, where a kind of court is established to judge the age."[74]

Du Châtelet's "half-philosophical" status had important consequences for her work as well as for her life. An outsider who by the eighteenth-century code of gender could never make it fully in, her contribution to philosophy was eccentric, if not original. Gardiner has commented on the advantageous aspect of her marginal position: a more critical attitude toward the Cartesian, Newtonian, and Leibnizian schools than that of their respective partisans in the philosophical mainstream.[75] Unlike the seventeenth-century cartésiennes, who

74. Voltaire, "Eloge historique de Madame la marquise du Châtelet," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Moland (Paris: Garnier, 1879), 23:519.

75. See Linda Gardiner, "Women in Science," in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, 190–91.

had trouble coming to terms with a discourse that was accessible to them yet in many ways unappealing, du Châtelet knew where she stood with Descartes. Unlike many of her male contemporaries, she saw the value in maintaining an intellectual tradition that, for her, began with the seventeenth-century French philosopher.

Du Châtelet's project of finding an integral world view nevertheless connects her to the cartésiennes. For as the seventeenth-century women had shown interest in "moralizing" the new mechanistic universe, so du Châtelet would not rest content with phenomenal explanations of the physical world. The cartésiennes were dissatisfied with an animal-machine lacking the soul that for them gave meaning to the natural world. Du Châtelet's adoption of Leibnizian sufficient reason was a more systematized effort to retain meaning in clock-like nature.[76]

In her quest for a systematized metaphysical base, du Châtelet was going against the philosophic tide. The distance between Emilie du Châtelet and the philosophes is well represented by Voltaire's mockery of the "best of all possible worlds" in *Candide* (1759). The author of the *Institutions* took the Leibnizian slogan seriously because it guaranteed physical order: "This World is . . . the best of all possible Worlds, the one in which there reigns the greatest diversity with the greatest order, in which the greatest effects are caused by the simplest Laws" (*Institutions*, sect. 27). Du Châtelet was aware that the philosophes were moving away from metaphysics and system-building. When she was preparing her *Institutions* for the Dutch edition, she asked Maupertuis to help her with the corrections and wondered if he would advise her to "cut out all the metaphysics" (Best. 274, 8 August 1741).

It was by "cutting out the metaphysics," or disengaging physics, the study of the natural world, from metaphysical systems, that the philosophes ultimately succeeded in carving out the discrete area that we have come to call science. In refusing that division, du Châtelet

76. Jean Erhard believes that with her translation of Newton's *Principia*, du Châtelet dropped her Leibnizian metaphysics. See Erhard, *Idée de nature*, 150. On this point he agrees with Barber, *Leibniz in France*, 191–92. Later, however, Barber revised his opinion with evidence that her interest in Leibniz continued until at least 1746, evidence that contradicts Voltaire's "Eloge historique de Madame la marquise du Châtelet (1752). See Barber, "Mme du Châtelet and Leibnizianism," 220–22. Wade, *Intellectual Development*, 289, rejects the supposition that she went through first a Newtonian, then a Leibnizian, and finally once more a Newtonian phase. He sees her engaged in an ongoing project to make sense of both the physics and metaphysics of her time.

took a lonely and original position. Perhaps only a "half-philosophe" could do so.

Olympe de Gouges: "Placed and displaced . . ."

With Olympe de Gouges we move from the world of Cartesian discourse to the politicized discourse of revolutionary times. A follower of Rousseau, de Gouges was certainly not a Cartesian. But the connecting thread that runs through Cartesianism to the Enlightenment and on to the French Revolution is not lost in her work. As the last figure in this study, de Gouges points forward to a feminism more militant than any that was possible within the confines of the old discursive paradigm. Her feminism, however, is of interest not because it was in advance of its times but because, seaming the Enlightenment and the Revolution, it was so much *of* its times. Textured by the Enlightenment discourse that helped to produce the Revolution, de Gouges's feminism provided a pattern against which late twentieth-century feminism has come to define itself.

History gives some support to de Gouges's claim that Jean-Jacques Le Franc de Pompignan was her father. Emilie du Châtelet had leveled charges of plagiarism against this man, a poetaster and academician from Montauban who happened to be one of Voltaire's antagonists (Best. 50, 22 December 1735; 52, 3 January 1736). There was a social world of difference between the circle that included du Châtelet and Le Franc de Pompignan and the family in which the woman originally called Marie Gouze grew up. De Gouges's mother, Anne-Olympe Mouisset, and Mouisset's two husbands all were bourgeois. De Gouges's supposedly legitimate father was a butcher. The young Marie received none of the educational benefits that du Châtelet had enjoyed as a girl. De Gouges's first language was Occitan (the dialect of her region), and she never mastered the art of writing in French. We owe the not inconsiderable body of her written work to the secretaries who took her dictation.

Widowed young after a brief and unhappy marriage to Louis-Yves Aubry, by whom she had a son, Marie Gouze took the name "Olympe de Gouges" and in 1767 left her native Montauban for Paris. There she applied in vain for financial help from Le Franc de Pompignan's son. Aubry doesn't seem to have left anything for their child. Perhaps it was to earn money that de Gouges embarked on a literary

career in the 1780s. She devoted herself to the Revolution as playwright, pamphleteer, and activist. In 1793, when she was forty-five, her Girondist sympathies earned her the guillotine.[77]

In 1791 Olympe de Gouges wrote: "O women, women! when will your blindness cease? What advantages have you reaped from the Revolution?" She urged her sisters to awaken to the "call of reason" and to realize that in the midst of enlightenment, men were oppressing women.[78] Her dim view of her masculine compatriots is summed up by this collective portrait: "Puffed up with learning and degenerate, showing the most crass ignorance in this age of light and wisdom, he seeks to rule like a despot over a sex endowed with the fullest intellectual faculties" (101). The Rousseauist cast of these statements is typical of de Gouges. Like Rousseau, with whom she identified to her last days, she thought of herself as a "pupil of pure nature."[79] Lacking in formal education herself, she echoed the theme of Rousseau's First and Second Discourses that the much-vaunted learning of "enlightened" France had brought little in the way of social progress.

De Gouges parted company with Rousseau in her egalitarian feminism and in her generally royalist orientation. She conceived of her *Bonheur primitif de l'homme* (Primitive Happiness of Man) (1789), a treatise that she calls a "happy fiction," as a revision of Rousseau's Second Discourse.[80] In the *Bonheur primitif*, she makes an ironic claim to be more Rousseauist than Jean-Jacques himself. It was probably his intelligence, she says, that prevented him from "understanding the true character of man in primitive times. But I, who am still influenced by that original ignorance and who am at once placed and displaced in this enlightened age, will perhaps have more accurate ideas to offer than he" (6).

77. See Oliver Blanc's excellent biography, *Une Femme de libertés: Olympe de Gouges*, rev. ed. (Paris: Syros/Alternatives, 1989).

78. Olympe de Gouges, "Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne," in *Oeuvres*, ed. Benoîte Groult (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), 106. Further page references to this edition will be given in the text in parentheses. De Gouges's "Déclaration" has also been reprinted in *Cahiers de doléances des femmes en 1789 et autres textes*, ed. Paule-Marie Duhet (Paris: des femmes, 1981), 205–23.

79. [Olympe de Gouges], "Réponse au champion américain, ou colon très-aisé à connoître" (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, pamphlet, 18 January 1790), 5. Cf. Blanc, *Olympe de Gouges*, 13.

80. See [Olympe] de Gouges, *L'Esclavage des noirs, ou l'heureux naufrage* (Paris: La Veuve Duchesne, La Veuve Bailly, 1792), 8. See also [Olympe de Gouges], *Le Bonheur primitif de l'homme, ou les rêveries patriotiques* (Amsterdam and Paris: Royer, Bailly, 1789), 6. Further references to these works will be found in parentheses in the text.

"Placed and displaced" aptly describes de Gouges's relation to Enlightenment discourse. Close in spirit to Rousseau and in ideas to Condorcet and the abolitionists, she nevertheless stood at a distance from all of them. Gender is her textual marker of distance and difference. It intervenes in her use of Rousseauist "nature" and in the egalitarian discourse of rights that she applies to women and slaves. Joan Wallach Scott has discussed the distinctive ambiguity that de Gouges's brought to her "Déclaration des droits de la femme" (Declaration of the Rights of Woman) in expressing both "her identity with the universal human individual and her difference." Scott argues that in grappling with the relation of embodied sexual difference to the discourse of abstract, universal human rights, de Gouges used precisely the discourse that could not take into account physically embodied difference.[81]

It will perhaps seem surprising that a self-identified feminist and author of a "Déclaration des droits de la femme" (1791) thought of herself as a follower of Rousseau.[82] The alliance of feminism and Rousseauist ideas was not unusual during the revolutionary years. Gary Kates has discussed this unlikely combination in the Cercle Social, "the most outspoken feminist group in the Revolution."[83] As Jean H. Bloch and Gita May have pointed out, Rousseau's views on women in his *Emile* (1762) were favorably received by many eighteenth-century women. In his vision of women as agents of France's moral regeneration, Rousseau struck a responsive chord in women who felt that their importance as wives and mothers had been neglected.[84] By the revolutionary period, Rousseau's call for moral regeneration through women had found its way into feminist pamphlet literature.[85] Another strain in this pamphlet literature goes beyond

81. See Joan Wallach Scott, "French Feminists and the Rights of 'Man': Olympe de Gouges's Declarations," *History Workshop* 28 (Autumn 1989): 1–21, esp. 9, 17. I am very grateful to Sheila ffolliott for stimulating my interest in Olympe de Gouges by referring me to this important article.

82. I am using "feminist" to refer to the championing of sexual egalitarianism and women's rights which characterized reformist thinking about women in de Gouges's day. She did not of course have the language of present-day feminism.

83. Gary Kates, "'The Powers of Husband and Wife Must Be Equal and Separate': The Cercle Social and the Rights of Women, 1790–91," in *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution*, ed. Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 163–80. The quotation is from 176.

84. Jean H. Bloch, "Women and the Reform of the Nation," in Spencer, *French Women*, 3–18. Gita May, "Rousseau's 'Antifeminism' Reconsidered," in Spencer, 309–17.

85. Bloch, "Reform," 16.

and against Rousseau in its claims for women's rights.[86] The coexistence of both strains in de Gouges's writings defines her problematic relation to the Genevan philosophe.

De Gouges takes up Rousseauist themes in her "Action héroïque d'une Françoise, ou La France sauvée par les femmes" (Heroic Action of a Frenchwoman, or France Saved by Women) (1789). Renewing a plea for a "patriotic fund" which she had published in 1788, she exhorts women to resign to national coffers their finery and objects of luxury (a project that was realized in 1789).[87] This sacrifice is what women can do, she says, while men are busy with "the regeneration of the Empire." It is women alone "who conserve the little humanity that still reigns in Paris, without which you would see avid, insatiable men devouring each other like wolves."[88]

Like Robert, de Gouges was consistent in her denunciation of luxury. In stressing the particular attachment of women to luxury, de Gouges locates herself in a tradition of complaints against aristocratic women that dates back to the seventeenth century.[89] Her Rousseauist rejection of luxury is allied with a Rousseauist vision of women (Sophie, Julie) as exemplars of unpretentious virtue.[90] This position, with its voluntaristic slant and its implied blame of the victim, contradicts her language of equal rights for women. Women as agents of moral regeneration are ultimately consigned to their separate, domes-

86. See Ruth Graham, "Rousseau's Sexism Revolutionized," in *Woman and Society in Eighteenth-Century France, Essays in Honour of John Stephenson Spink*, ed. W. H. Barber et al., 129–35. (London: Athlone, 1979).

87. She was not alone in making this plea. See the "Motion à faire et arrêté à prendre dans les différentes Classes et Corporations de Citoyennes Françoises" (Sept. 1789), in *Cahiers de doléances des femmes en 1789 et autres textes*, ed. Paule-Marie Duhet (Paris: des femmes, 1981), 75–78. Women continued to sacrifice their personal possessions to the nation during the revolutionary period, and especially after the onset of war in 1792. See Olwen Hufton, "Women in Revolution 1789–1796," *Past and Present* 53 (November 1971): 99–100.

88. [Olympe de Gouges], "Action héroïque d'une Françoise, ou La France sauvée par les femmes. Il est plus d'un moyen de servir la Patrie" (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, pamphlet, Guillaume, n.d.), 6. Further references to this pamphlet will appear in parentheses in the text.

89. See Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 25–38, 66–89. This section on Olympe de Gouges owes much to Landes's book. See esp. chap. 4, "Women and Revolution," 93–151.

90. I liken Sophie to Julie on the basis of their value as representatives of feminine virtue. A good discussion of their differences is to be found in P. D. Jimack, "The Paradox of Sophie and Julie: Contemporary Response to Rousseau's Ideal Wife and Ideal Mother," in Barber et al., *Woman and Society*, 152–65.

tic sphere and asked to play second fiddle to the men who are out there doing the real revolutionary work. De Gouges asks women to put to shame the "egoism of calculating capitalists" (she was among the first to use the term) by renouncing their treasures. But it is men who have all the revolutionary glory. The women will act as adjuncts: "In more modest and simple dress, you will have only more right to public esteem and admiration. Your names . . . will be placed next to those of famous men, tutelary geniuses whose efforts to lift France out of slavery would be useless without your help" (6).

The problem with assigning the agency for moral regeneration to women is that it confines them to their sexuality. Motherhood was central to the feminized vision of moral regeneration, for it was in the capacity of mothers that women would rear virtuous citizens. Sexuality, then, was of central importance in de Gouges's demand for women's political equality. Scott notes that the tenth and eleventh articles of de Gouges's "Déclaration des droits de la femme," which revise the corresponding articles on freedom of speech and thought in the "Déclaration des droits de l'homme" (Declaration of the Rights of Man), expose the contradiction between a discourse of abstract rights and embodied difference. In article eleven, de Gouges defends a woman's right to name the father of her child (and therefore to initiate paternity suits). Scott, who notes that the articles of de Gouges's document generally parallel those of the "Déclaration des droits de l'homme," often by the simple addition of "citoyennes" to "citoyens," points out that the "add women and stir" variety of feminism breaks down here. At this point de Gouges's feminism "called for a refutation of sexuality and maternity as grounds for silencing women, for disqualifying them as subjects, for leaving them out of *The Declaration of the Rights of Man*." Sex, the very reason for exclusion from the political process, becomes one of de Gouges's reasons for inclusion when it is a matter of giving women the right to insist on men's paternal responsibilities and to expose "the abuses of patriarchal power."[91]

Scott pinpoints a dilemma attached to the peculiar political situation of women during the French Revolution. The status of "*citoyennes* without citizenship," as Dominique Godineau puts it,[92] inevitably

91. Scott, "French Feminists," 10–11.

92. Dominique Godineau, "Masculine and Feminine Political Practice during the French Revolution, 1793–Year III," in Applewhite and Levy, *Women and Politics*, 68. On

exacerbated the conflict of claims between female sexuality and disembodied mind. Femaleness has both a negative and a positive value in de Gouges's demands for equality. Site of exclusion, its inclusion would eventuate in the moral reform of the nation with women's right to enforce the obligations of paternity. At the same time, the "natural" basis for equal rights is unembodied. De Gouges reminds her reader of the mind that has no sex in the preamble to her "Déclaration" by a reference to women as the "sex that has received the full range of intellectual faculties" (101).

De Gouges's plea in the "Déclaration" to recognize the value of sexuality and motherhood revises the newly conceived relation of the individual to the state. For the abstract individual of liberal political doctrine, de Gouges would substitute the family as the fundamental unit of society.[93] Yet her simultaneous claim for equality based on unembodied mind reinforces the notion of abstract individualism. A comparison of her articles three and four with articles three and four of the original "Déclaration" reveals that the family was the prism through which de Gouges envisioned the institution of equal rights based on "natural" equality:

DDH: III. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation; no body, no individual may exercise authority that does not expressly emanate from it.

DDF: III. The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation, which is nothing other than the reunion of woman and man: no body, no individual, may exercise authority that does not expressly emanate from it.

DDH: IV. Freedom consists in the power of doing anything that does not harm others. Thus the exercise of each man's natural rights has no

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the contradictory position of the citoyenne, see also William H. Sewell, Jr., "Le citoyen-/la citoyenne: Activity, Passivity, and the Revolutionary Concept of Citizenship," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, ed. Colin Lucas (New York: Pergamon, 1988), 2:105–23.

93. De Gouges was not alone in linking politics and the family. Gary Kates has discussed the importance of the family—particularly of reform in divorce and inheritance laws—for the revolutionary politics of the Cercle Social. See Kates, "Powers," 170–77. Dorinda Outram contends, however, that (masculine) revolutionary discourse was hostile to the family and therefore that "a far more normal female response to the Revolution" was to reject it. See Dorinda Outram, "*Le Langage mâle de la vertu*: Women and the Discourse of the French Revolution," in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 127–29.

limits other than those that assure the other members of society the enjoyment of the same rights, limits that may be set only by law.

DDF: IV. Freedom and justice consist in giving back ["rendre"] everything that belongs to others; thus the exercise of woman's natural rights finds limits only in the perpetual tyranny imposed on her by man. These limits must be reformed by the laws of nature and reason.[94]

Barbara Woshinsky, in her close comparison of the two "Déclarations," comments that de Gouges's fourth article was written from the perspective of one who had been excluded from the political process.[95] Indeed de Gouges does not *claim* equal rights so much as she *re*-claims an original inclusion. Like many writers of feminist pamphlet literature of her day, de Gouges demanded not the institution of new rights for women but the restoration of their "natural" rights.[96] Taken together, articles three and four proclaim that in a reconceived nation, women and the family would be restored to their "natural" place.

De Gouges's redefinition of the state as the "reunion of woman and man" carries at least a double layer of meaning. "Woman" is a contextual creature who takes her place in the family, present for the roll call of "mothers, daughters, and sisters" as representatives of the nation (102). The nation, then, is possible only as a result of the reproductive work of the family, and the family is the "natural" foundation of the state. De Gouges's use of "reunion" rather than "union" implies a prior separation. Article four specifies the separation as man's tyranny over woman, to be redressed by a return, or "giving back" to women of their lost natural right to a political voice. De Gouges sees enfranchisement as a return to nature.

94. De Gouges, "Déclaration des droits," 103. The translations of both "Déclarations" are my own. For the purposes of comparison, I have tried to be as literal as possible. It's interesting that both de Gouges and Condorcet employ intertextuality in the service of the same ironic rhetorical strategy. See Condorcet, "Sur l'admission des députés des planteurs de Saint-Domingue, dans l'Assemblée Nationale" (1789), in Marie Jean Antoine de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *Oeuvres*, ed. A. Condorcet O'Connor and M. F. Arago, 12 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1847–49; reprint, Stuttgart-Bad-Canstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1968), 9:479–80. Further references to Condorcet's works will be to this edition.

95. Barbara Woshinsky, "Olympe de Gouges' *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (1791)," *Mary Wollstonecraft Newsletter* 2 (December 1973), 5.

96. On similar claims in pamphlet literature, see Graham, "Rousseau's Sexism," 131–34.

She again invokes the "laws of nature and reason" in article five: "The laws of nature and reason prohibit any action harmful to society" (103). In both articles four and five of the "Déclaration des droits de l'homme," no such phrase is found; "law" alone is used. De Gouges, in substituting natural for positive law, does more than "simply pluralize the concept of citizenship";[97] she suggests that in omitting an original, "natural" equality the founding fathers of the French republic left their task undone.[98] By exposing the injustices concealed by positive law, she ironizes the preamble to the Constitution.[99]

De Gouges appended a "Social Contract of Man and Woman" to her "Déclaration," signifying that social revolution had to start with the family.[100] This "bizarre document," as she calls it (110), substitutes a contractual union for the sacrament of marriage, proposes the right to divorce along with economic and sexual equality for sexual partners, married or not, and reiterates a proposal she had made in the *Bonheur primitif de l'homme* to establish specially designated districts for prostitutes.[101] As with the seventeen articles of the "Déclaration" itself, the appendix both continues and ironizes the document to which it refers (in this case Rousseau's *Social Contract*). A social contract that omits women and the family, de Gouges implies, will only perpetuate oppression. Rousseau is necessary to the formulation that becomes a critique of his thought.[102]

As Woshinsky has remarked, de Gouges's article thirteen set forth a radical reevaluation of family economy and stressed the social impor-

97. Scott, "French Feminists," 9. Scott, however, also comments that de Gouges's "Déclaration" functions as a Derridean "supplement" to the original "Déclaration," both adding to and replacing it (7–8).

98. Cf. Woshinsky, "De Gouges' *Déclaration*," 3.

99. Woshinsky speaks of de Gouges's "ironic contrast between men's ideal and women's reality" ("De Gouges' *Declaration*," 3).

100. Scott, "French Feminists," 11, sees the "Contract" as an equation of marriage and society, "both voluntary unions, entered . . . by rights-bearing individuals." Certainly de Gouges suggests an analogy between marriage and society, but the pointed reference to Rousseau suggests also a more dynamic relation between the family and society.

101. Appeals for better treatment of prostitutes were commonly found among women's demands of the time. See Jean Rabaut, *Histoire des féminismes français* (Paris: Stock, 1978), 55. In 1792 important reforms in marriage and divorce were enacted into law, measures that were only too short-lived. See Graham, "Rousseau's Sexism," 137.

102. Nadine Bérenguier points out that Rousseau did not see the family as ruled by contract. See Nadine Bérenguier, "L'Infortune des alliances: Famille et roman au dix-huitième siècle" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1988), 142. De Gouges was not the first to appropriate the *Contrat social* for feminist claims. Mademoiselle Jodin had done so in her *Vues législatives pour les femmes adressées à l'Assemblée Nationale* (1790). See Graham, "Rousseau's Sexism," 133–34.

tance of women's labor.[103] Men and women contribute equally to the economy, de Gouges states in this article, women doing their share of service and drudgery. Therefore, women should have an equal share of public employment and office (105). In contrast to Rousseau, de Gouges brings women into the public sphere by socializing their labor. Scott sees de Gouges's revision of the public and private spheres as in part a ratification of the status quo: "De Gouges tried to deny the possibility of any meaningful opposition between public and private, political and domestic, while at the same time working with a notion of marital or sexual union conceived in terms of those very oppositions."[104] The full force of Scott's comment is apparent when we recall the auxiliary role that de Gouges assigned to revolutionary women in her "Action héroïque." But with respect to the "Déclaration," Scott underestimates the extent to which de Gouges destabilized the discourse of public and private by socializing family labor.

The view of women's labor as essential to the state's economy is part of a radical reconception of their role as a public one. Condorcet took a much less radical position in his "Sur l'Admission des femmes au droit de cité" (On Granting Civic Rights to Women) (1790). He calmed fears that women's enfranchisement would result in their neglect of domestic duties with the assurance that at the present level of European civilization only a small minority of female citizens would enter public life. "You would no more tear women from their homes than laborers from their plows," he said. Enfranchisement would only make women into better wives and mothers, he added, reasoning much like John Stuart Mill in the following century. Besides, he said, "it is natural . . . that [women] lead a more retired and domestic life."[105]

De Gouges's proposals are like a realization of the worst fears of the seventeenth-century antifeminists. For if the femme savante in her theoretical rejection of marriage was seen as a threat to the social order, de Gouges spelled out that threat in all too explicit terms. She broadens the social implications of Robert's critique of arranged marriage based on interest. Robert, like her seventeenth-century prede-

103. Woshinsky, "De Gouges' *Declaration*," 5.

104. Scott, "French Feminists," 12.

105. Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, "Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité," in *Oeuvres*, 10:128. Paule-Marie Duhet has commented on this passage that it is a weak point in his argument. She also shows that de Gouges was more radical than Condorcet on the question of women's suffrage. See Paule-Marie Duhet, *Les Femmes et la Révolution, 1789–1794* (Paris: Julliard, 1971), 64–71.

cessors, was more concerned about individual happiness than about social reform in her desire to promote love matches over marriages of interest. Yet reform of marriage along the lines envisioned by Robert and the précieuses carried inevitable social consequences. De Gouges shares the philosophes' conviction that collective happiness is essential to personal happiness. (The personal tone of du Châtelet's discourse on happiness separates her from the philosophic current.) But de Gouges's prescription for collective happiness differs significantly from that of Rousseau, the philosophe to whom she was most indebted.

As an archaeology of happiness, de Gouges's *Bonheur primitif de l'homme* complements Rousseau's archaeology of inequality in the Second Discourse. She follows the Genevan back to prehistorical times in order to describe the original happiness of "man emerging from the hands of Nature" (6). She locates the leading cause of human unhappiness not in private property and the unequal distribution of wealth but in "ambition." A "primitive equality" in which there were no masters or servants and "everyone was both master and subordinate" (18) doesn't appear to be the major source of happiness. Instead, original happiness resides in the family, which, unlike the family in Rousseau's Second Discourse, is a natural and not a social phenomenon: "The finest institution of men's happiness and of natural law was the respect that they had for the sacred tie that united the spouses." The marriage she describes is curiously like Robert's. Its voluntary, contractual, and unceremonial character is figured by its site atop a mountain under the benign protection of the sun (18–19).

There is no sexual division of labor in de Gouges's vision of primitive times. Only nursing mothers are exempt from "public work." "Girls will go to the fields and guard the animals" (14). In her novel, *Le Prince philosophe* (1792), de Gouges counters the antifeminist apology of "natural" sexual hierarchy with a feminist sociobiology. Nature made man and woman such that "they could compete on an equal footing, and their work was the same. Man alone has taken from his mate all the means to replace or relieve him in his work." Not quite correctly, she cites examples of animals with no sexual division of labor, such as bees, silkworms, swallows, etc.[106]

The original father and founder of de Gouges's imagined society in *Le Bonheur primitif de l'homme* is a benevolent patriarch, much like the

106. [Olympe de Gouges], *Le Prince philosophe, conte oriental* (Paris: Briand, 1792), 2:11–12. Further references to this novel will be found in parentheses in the text; the first number indicates the part.

enlightened monarch she would have wanted on France's throne. The first patriarch institutes laws of community of goods and humanity which are broken when an adulterous couple violates the family bonds. The tale of this adulterous couple's return to the community after a period of exile is a parable of the origins of unhappiness: the technological expertise and wealth that they bring back with them cause the adulterous father to be greeted as a prophet. Ambition combines with revealed religion, learning, unequal distribution of wealth, and the original breach in the family to produce the fall from a state of natural happiness.

Much of *Le Bonheur primitif* is an argument for constitutional monarchy. Nature is the backdrop for de Gouges's evaluation of her country's problems on the eve of the French Revolution. Since in her opinion it was too late to return to the state of "primitive happiness," she does not advocate social equality as a solution. Her tendentious framework leads her to a logical inconsistency in the natural-law argument: she appeals to nature for sexual but not for social equality. Against the Jacobin "enthusiasts of freedom" (46), she writes that republics are a "perpetual tyranny," where "citizens have a thousand tyrants as their Master" (58). Since humans have lost their "primitive happiness," "they've gotten tired of everything, even of monarchy" (59).

On one level, de Gouges makes a purely pragmatic argument for maintenance of the status quo. Once class society has been installed, so her line of thinking goes, any attempt to return to equality will bring disruption, conflict, and anarchy: "Since authority has been introduced among men, this same authority should cleverly keep each class in its place" (22). However, she seeks to support her argument with standard conservative claims based on nature: "I'd like all men of every rank and class to be raised in the profession and condition of their father: a brave military man would only form good soldiers; an upright Magistrate, good Judges. . . . I think that blood and heredity have much influence on men's talents. By varying and perverting [dénaturer] men, you won't accomplish anything. Ah! if we could only get a little closer to nature, men would be what they should be" (55). In her appeals to nature and social utility, she joins the arguments of philosophes such as Turgot, d'Holbach, and Voltaire.[107]

107. See Robert Mauzi, *L'Idée du bonheur dans la littérature et la pensée française au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1965), 153–57.

De Gouges's social conservatism emerges in her idea of learning as simply an impetus to unwanted social mobility: "Where is the man who isn't learned today? What Lackey, Tailor, or Greengrocer wouldn't want to be a philosophe? The frenzy for education has become a national disease. Every man strives for the same goal; you can hardly distinguish the sage from the madman" (22). The anti-intellectualism of the *Bonheur primitif* has few points of similarity to Rousseau's, although both authors see learning as an agent of corruption. But de Gouges argues against Rousseau that prehistorical humans possessed a natural knowledge that flowered before the great length of time that Rousseau in his Second Discourse saw as necessary for the formation of language (31–34). The nature to which she appeals for preservation of the social order seems to have frozen learning at a socially useful point. She cannot accept Rousseau's more consistent argument that knowledge developed along with social and political hierarchy as another support to an unequal economic order. Were she to do so, she would logically be led to a radical republicanism that she steadfastly rejected.

The natural-law argument gets de Gouges into trouble, because her nature founds both equality and inequality. She argues, for example, that private property is natural. The seventeenth article of her "Déclaration des droits de la femme" closely follows the corresponding article of the original document in setting forth the "inviolable and sacred" right of private property. She adds only that the right belongs to "nature's patrimony" and that it must be extended to women (106).

De Gouges's universalist, philosophic appeal to nature ultimately elides class.[108] Poor and illiterate herself, but with family ties to both the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, de Gouges was well positioned to seek a solidarity of women across class. In order to function, however, such a solidarity can be premised only on a class consciousness that neither de Gouges nor the majority of eighteenth-century feminists possessed. Although de Gouges showed compassion for the masses of women who participated in bread riots, she could not have foreseen, for example, that much of the luxury she denounced was produced by women workers who would be hurt by the decline of luxury industry during the Revolution.[109]

108. Rabaut, *Histoire des féminismes*, 58, comments that de Gouges was for sexual but not social equality.

109. See Hufton, "Women in Revolution," 99–100.

It is perhaps because of de Gouges's inability to address issues of class that she has appeared to scholars as politically isolated or marginal.[110] According to Marie Maclean, who distinguishes political opposition from revolution, de Gouges was a "revolutionary" almost by default since she was excluded (or excluded herself) from the norms of feminine opposition.[111] Jane Abray contends that revolutionary feminism itself was marginal and that it failed to win a broad base.[112] More recently, however, Gary Kates has shown that important political figures of the Revolution participated in the agitation for women's rights in the Cercle Social, which provided a center for a wide network of feminist activists.[113] Contemporary pamphlet literature provides ample evidence that there was also a sympathetic "virtual public" of discontented and politicized women.[114] De Gouges could not exploit it, in part because of her own lack of class consciousness. For although she sympathized with the plight of the poor, her appeals to "women" indicate little awareness of what it would have meant to organize across class.[115]

More important, there existed no discourse of equality, at once sexual and social. It is hard to agree with David Williams that "by the 1780s feminism had become well integrated into the broader movements for social change."[116] Although there was no dearth of self-

110. See Rabaut, *Histoire des féminismes*, 57, and Duhet, *Femmes*, 86.

111. See Marie Maclean, "Revolution and Opposition: Olympe de Gouges and the *Déclaration des droits de la femme*," in *Literature and Revolution*, ed. David Bevan, vol. 2 of *Rodopi Perspectives on Modern Literature* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1989), 171–82.

112. Jane Abray, "Feminism in the French Revolution," *American Historical Review* 80, 1 (February 1975): 59.

113. See Kates, "Powers," 164–65.

114. For examples of this literature, see the collections in Duhet, *Cahiers*, and in *Women in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1795*, ed. Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979). See also Candice E. Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990), 110–30. Proctor reviews a diverse body of literature from the revolutionary period on women's rights written by both men and women. A chapter that she devotes to pamphlet literature satirizing claims for women's rights (131–53) provides evidence that there was a phenomenon visible enough to satirize. Proctor nevertheless comments (181) that there was no unified movement for equal women's rights in the Revolution.

115. The Cercle Social also suffered from this deficiency. Its women's branch, the Confédération des Amies de la Vérité, was for wealthy bourgeois women, who included their poorer sisters only as objects of charity. See Kates, "Powers," 173.

116. David Williams, "The Politics of Feminism in the French Enlightenment," in *The Varied Pattern: Studies in the 18th Century*, ed. Peter Hughes and David Williams (Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), 337.

professed defenders of women among the philosophes, the feminism of the day was still too firmly rooted in "nature" to become a basis for radical change, as the vicissitudes of the Revolution were to prove. There is an undeniable irony to de Gouges's (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) dedication of her "Déclaration" to Marie-Antoinette. The complex social and gender divisions of the Old Regime were such that de Gouges's sexual egalitarianism and Rousseau's social egalitarianism ultimately met on a negative ground. Their arguments founder on the same obstacle: how can nature be at once egalitarian and hierarchical?[117]

The same question arises with respect to de Gouges's writings on slavery. Her play, *L'Esclavage des noirs, ou l'heureux naufrage* (Black Slavery, or the Fortunate Shipwreck) (1789) makes an eloquent stand against the colonialists for the abolition of slavery. Yet the plot has a curiously conservative twist. Zamor and Mirza, two American Indians (like many writers of the time, de Gouges confused American Indians and Africans), are shipwrecked on an island when they attempt to flee from their master. Zamor has killed one of his master's white subordinates in self-defense during a struggle over the white man's sexual advances to Mirza. The Indian slave saves the life of a young white woman, Sophie, whose husband, Valère, had given her up for dead in the wreck. For his heroism Zamor earns the friendship and compassion of the young couple. The runaways are eventually caught, and Zamor is given the death sentence. Zamor's master, Saint-Frémont, who is the governor of the territory, is presented as benevolent but under pressure to make an example of Zamor to the other slaves who have mounted a revolt in protest against his death sentence. Zamor's life is spared at the last minute when Saint-Frémont discovers that Sophie, who intercedes on the slave's behalf, is his long-lost daughter. Saint-Frémont offers Zamor and Mirza their freedom, but they refuse. They want nothing more than to remain with him and his family, they tell him. Mirza says that she and Zamor will live for love and that "we will always be happy, always, always" (88).

This capitulation may have been de Gouges's strategic bid for public sympathy. She had been trying to get her play (originally titled *Zamor et Mirza*) performed by the Comédie Française since 1785. Although she was not a member of the French abolitionist society, the

117. I cannot agree with Joan Scott's reading of de Gouges as "using examples about marriage to counter notions of fixed social hierarchies" ("French Feminists," 12).

"Amis des Noirs" (Friends of Blacks), she was one of its firm supporters and was witness to the colonialist reaction against it. Her play finally had a brief run at the end of 1789 and the beginning of 1790. It divided the actors politically and roused a storm of criticism. De Gouges was depressed by the unfavorable reception, but not unprepared, since she had struggled so long simply to see the play performed.[118] In 1788, in her "Réflexions sur les hommes nègres" (Reflections on Black Men), she had written of the *sensibilité* that moved her to compassion for the plight of the slaves. She urged the actors of the Comédie Française to wear black-face and authentic costume in order to make an impact on the public. To the antiabolitionist objection that an end to slavery would mean labor lost in the colonies she countered that freedom would not occasion the slaves' wholesale migration to other lands: "The freedom of Blacks will result in some deserters, but far fewer than among the inhabitants of the French countryside."[119]

It was perhaps to show that Zamor and Mirza, once freed, would not "desert" French territory, but would remain to do their share of colonial exploitation that de Gouges had them refuse to leave their master. In the preface to her play, she reminds the colonialists of "all I've written to conserve for them their properties and their dearest interests" (4). Abolition of slavery did not mean abolition of colonialism, and there is no suggestion in *L'Esclavage des noirs* that de Gouges linked the two. In both her play and her "Réflexions" she joins contemporaries such as Doigny du Ponceau and Sébastien-André Sibire in suggesting that one advantage of abolition would be the cessation of disruptive slave revolts.[120]

Moreover, the deferral of an outright decree of freedom evokes the gradualist solutions proposed by so many of the contemporary abolitionists, including Montesquieu and Condorcet.[121] Like Condorcet,

118. See Blanc, *Olympe de Gouges*, 65–79.

119. Olympe de Gouges, "Reflexions sur les hommes nègres" (February 1788), in Groult, *Oeuvres*, 86.

120. De Gouges, "Réflexions," 85. See also [Doigny du Ponceau], "Discours d'un nègre à un Européen" (Paris: Demonville, 1775), 9–11, and Sébastien-André Sibire, *L'Aristocratie négrière, ou réflexions philosophiques et historiques sur l'esclavage et l'affranchissement des noirs, dédiées à l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris: Lesclapart, Desray, 1789), 89. Further references to Sibire's treatise will be found in parentheses in the text.

121. See Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, "Réflections sur l'esclavage des nègres" (1781), *Oeuvres*, 7:95–105. Further references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text. See also Condorcet, "Au Corps Eléctoral, contre l'esclavage des noirs," *Oeuvres*, 9:472–73. Cf. Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code noir, ou le*

Sibire put forth a detailed plan for slow liberation.[122] De Gouges proposes no specific plan, contenting herself in the "Réflexions sur les hommes nègres" with the hope that the "frightful fate of the blacks" will be "changed, or at least alleviated" (84).

The final note of *L'Esclavage des noirs*, a prayer for freedom, is sounded not by the slave but by the master. "Let our common rejoicings be a happy portent of liberty," Saint-Frémont says (90), following which there is a concluding ballet. Saint-Frémont is a moral example both of the "enlightened and beneficent government" (90) for which de Gouges hoped and of the good slaveholder. She was not alone in her exhortations to the masters. Sibire promises that if the master were to teach his slave social and religious virtues, the slave would be ready to die for him in gratitude (109–11). Condorcet remarks that masters alone are to blame for whatever "stupidity" their slaves may show, because although the slaves are baptized, they receive no religious instruction (94).

The moral lesson of *L'Esclavage des noirs* is drawn by a parallel between colonial slavery and political oppression at home. Valère tells Mirza that the French must gain their own freedom in order to be able to deal with slavery. In response to her naive assumption that freedom already prevails in France, he explains: "We're superficially free, but our chains are only the heavier. For several centuries the French have been groaning under the weight of the Ministers' and Courtiers' despotism. The power of one Master alone is in the hands of a thousand Tyrants who trample the People under foot. The People will one day burst their chains and will claim all its rights under Natural law. It will teach the Tyrants just what a people united by long oppression and enlightened by sound philosophy can do" (24).

The analogy of slavery and French despotism was a familiar one to Olympe de Gouges and her readers. Rousseau had used it in both his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* and his *Social Contract*.[123] The comparison may have touched the sensibilité of some of de Gouges's spectators. Beyond its tactical value, the message belongs to the universalist language that she borrows from the philosophic discourse of the day. The equation of political oppression and slavery conceals discrepancies in power and wealth that recovery

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calvaire de Canaan (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), 272–73. On Montesquieu, see Sala-Molins, 232–33.

122. Sibire, *Aristocratie négrière*, 101–11.

123. Cf. Sala-Molins, *Code noir*, 241.

of natural rights would not dispel. "Men everywhere are equal," she says in her "Réflexions sur les hommes nègres." "Kings who are just do not want slaves; they know that they have submissive subjects" (84). If kings were just, slavery would be abolished, but the social hierarchy would remain.

De Gouges also adopts the commonplace image of slavery as a figure for the oppression of women. In her "Déclaration des droits de la femme," she deplores the commodification of women in the Old Regime. Women have had no other recourse, she says, but to sell their bodies for wealth and social advancement. "Can reason deny that all other roads to fortune are closed to woman, who is bought by man like the slave on the African coast?" (108). As if to emphasize the comparison, she concludes the "Déclaration" with a plea for humane treatment of the slaves and respect for freedom at home and abroad (111–12).

The Rousseauist discourse of nature left de Gouges stuck in a set of contradictions which could not move her beyond the meliorist solutions suggested by the use of "oppression" as an undifferentiated category for slavery, for the condition of French women, and for the Old Regime. As Scott has said, arguments from nature "could focus the argument on what *was* in nature rather than on what should be in politics" ("French Feminists," 15). De Gouges looks to nature for both the family as the founding social unit and for the individual rights that justify sexual equality. But her family is "naturally" hierarchical, headed by a benevolent patriarch, such as the first father in the *Bonheur primitif*. It cannot coexist with the argument based on original individual equality. If she had pursued the line of thought that led her to the conclusion in the *Bonheur primitif* that it was too late to return to nature, she might have been able to move on to politics. But the Enlightenment's nature was a staple of current political discourse.

The philosophy of de Gouges's novel, *Le Prince philosophe* (1792) is one of closeness to nature. A reformist work written in a revolutionary climate, the novel offers as alternatives to tyranny either a benevolent monarchy or return to a Golden Age of no government at all.[124] The novel dramatizes the tensions inherent in the argument from nature for sexual and social equality. In particular, it reveals de

124. Malcolm C. Cook in his study of revolutionary fiction does not classify *Le Prince philosophe* as a political allegory set in the Orient but sees only a general topical allusion. See Malcolm C. Cook, "Politics in the Fiction of the French Revolution, 1789–1794," in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 201 (1982): 277.

Gouges's difficulty in adapting the Rousseauist discourse of equality to her moderate political views and to her aspirations for women's rights.

The novel features a line of learned and wise kings of Siam who are such good rulers that, like Rousseau's Emile and his tutor envisioning sovereignty, they would prefer not to rule at all. In fact, under the weight of the responsibility they feel to serve their subjects well, they see themselves as their people's slaves. The protagonist, Almoladin, is forced to flee the kingdom at the age of sixteen because of plotting by his wicked stepmother, who dies not long after. Almoladin's sister, Géroïde, also in exile, wanders into a harem and eventually marries its ruler, the emperor of China. Almoladin and his father, who has succeeded in recovering him, go to the Chinese court, where they are reunited with Géroïde. There Almoladin falls in love with a portrait of the seemingly young and beautiful Princess Idamée, who when he meets her turns out to be nearly thirty and scarred by smallpox. Feeling strangely honor-bound, he marries her and brings her back to Siam along with a young shepherdess named Palmire, who happened to be at the court. The inevitable occurs, and Almoladin, braving his wife's jealousy, falls in love with Palmire. Idamée for her part enters into a love affair with a court mandarin which ends tragically when she commits suicide after killing him. Almoladin abdicates in favor of his son, Noradin, and goes off with Palmire, now his bride, to a kind of new Golden Age. The couple has a son and finds happiness ever after in the simple peasant life. Their son leaves to join the army and ends up at court, where, after some misadventures, he marries Noradin's daughter.

Embedded in the complications of this romance-like plot (of which I've given only the barest outline) is a feminist story. Much of the second part of the novel has to do with Idamée's proposals to improve the lot of women under her reign as queen. Met with Almoladin's refusal to let her share in political rule, Idamée submits a detailed plan to one of the mandarins for women's entry into public life, which includes equality in education and in job opportunities (2:10–17). The proposals are interlaced with disapproving remarks on women's neglect of their household duties for frivolous attentions to fashion and appearance (2:16).

Nevertheless, it is a radical plan, and Almoladin reacts with machismo. In front of the queen, he pours forth his sarcasm to their son, "You'll be governed by your wife, just like all your subjects, and everything will be much better. Men will become women, and since

they will no longer have power, strength, courage, or charm, they'll only be poor fools to whom women will barely deign to give thought and whom they'll use only in the direst necessity, if the world doesn't end with this famous revolution" (2:19). Almoladin does see a certain interest to the proposal, but he decides that it's better not to authorize the "dangerous enterprise." It might "beget a revolution that could eventually work to the disadvantage of the currently more powerful party" (2:17–18).

At this point the reader begins to wonder about the title of the novel. How philosophical is Almoladin? Does he have *all* his subjects' interests at heart? Is the title an ironic commentary on the philosophes? Discussion of the plan has an immediate effect on women, who start to become less frivolous and more modest. Newly fashionable bonnets disappear (20–21). This Rousseauist critique of luxury and civilization, aimed as it is at women, raises questions about the novel's feminism.

In order to resolve an incipient battle of the sexes, Almoladin proposes a series of three public debates between three male-female pairs representing respectively childhood, youth, and age. The first question, "if young ladies should be given an education stronger than their constitution," is settled not by debate but rather by a duel between the two children. The victory of the girl, who has disguised herself as a boy, convinces the king that "education is all." He stops short of action, however. "It would be too dangerous to raise all women like this little lady knight (petite chevalière)." In an aside he tells his male intimates, "Some day this child will be a great man in my kingdom, but I want only one of this kind" (2:29). The subject of the third debate is whether the female reproductive system and life cycle incapacitate women for the tasks that men now perform. In its focus on the body, this question is the counterpart of the first. It is settled in favor of the woman when she demonstrates that of the two older people, she is the one with the greater physical strength.

The question of whether "women have enough courage and strength of mind to be inflexible and steady in their opinions" forms the subject of the second debate. Because the debaters happen to be a pair of secret lovers, the young man decides to present a defense of love. He is convinced that his argument will assure triumph over "the dangerous sex." The young woman, who has come prepared with a learned disquisition on natural philosophy and metaphysics, is nonplussed by the man's "simple and gallant" presentation. To Idamée's embarrassment, she loses.

The second debate encapsulates the feminist dilemma of the novel. Almoladin's two women, Idamée and Palmire, enact the conflict of the intellectual and the sexual which lies at the heart of the debate. Almoladin's marriage to Idamée is philosophical, a tendre amitié based on estime (2:40). The old-fashioned variety of desexualized tendre amitié still worked for Robert's heroines, but it seems to be a total failure here. Idamée is discredited several times over. The modest feminist victory in the debates wins her only Almoladin's establishment of a women's academy with her at its head. In the seventeenth century, Antoinette de Salvan de Saliez's proposal for such an academy seemed quite radical, but in the revolutionary period the idea struck a different chord. Madame de Genlis's *Club des dames* was deliberately archaic, and a proposal in 1788 by Madame la Baronne Duplessy to found a "Musée pour les femmes," a women's academy with courses on geography and genies, sounded like a throwback to earlier times.[125] Not only does Idamée lose Almoladin to the beautiful young Palmire, the circumstances of her death are particularly damaging to her cause. Her partner in adulterous crime is the very mandarin who supported her proposal for women's rights.

Palmire is a Rousseauean woman, content to live in obscurity with the men she loves—her first lover Corydas, now dead, Corydas's aged father Palémon, and finally Almoladin. Unlike the princess Idamée, a creature of the court, Palmire lives close to nature on a remote island far from civilization. The love that wins in this novel, is a "law of nature" (2:80), an irresistible "inclination" that is supremely indifferent to rank, wealth, and other trappings of civilization (a familiar theme of Robert's novels).

The conflict between Palmire as embodied sexuality and Idamée as disembodied mind motivates the bipolarity of nature and civilization. With this layer of meaning, the boundaries between the two women become less clear. Idamée, too, is in a sense close to nature. The feminist sociobiology with which she rationalizes her arguments for sexual equality is an appeal to an original nature that preceded the sexual division of labor in the civilizing process (2:11–12). And Palmire has something of civilization about her, for during her stay in a

125. On Duplessy's proposal, see the review of her *Répertoire des lectures faites au Musée des Dames*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1788) in the *Mercure de France* (14 February 1789): 76–77. Duplessy held a salon in Bordeaux, among the attractions of which were her extensive collection of natural history and her instruments for experiments in physics and chemistry. See Léon Abensour, *La Femme et le féminisme avant la Révolution* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1923), 314, 316.

neighboring kingdom "everyone admired her nobility beneath her coarse, rustic clothing " (155). Young Palémon, the son born to Palmire and Almoladin, seems to inherit this natural nobility, for, although he doesn't reveal his identity when he goes to court, he is recognized as noble almost immediately by his half-brother Noradin. His marriage to the princess, Noradin's daughter, completes the circle: beneath civilization is an equalizing nature, but natural nobility rises to the surface in civilization. Civilization, then, conceals a natural hierarchy. Love operates as a social leveler, which paradoxically reveals the hierarchy (Palmire is naturally noble and Idamée is naturally base).

Nature in de Gouges's novel seems both to contradict Rousseau's picture of original equality in the Second Discourse and to illustrate his view of women. Superficially, the conflict between Palmire and Idamée, between sexual difference and disembodied mind, is settled in favor of sexuality. Yet we are made to wonder. At the end of the novel we learn that the little girl who won the duel over the first question has become an ambassador. Does she fulfill Almoladin's prediction that she would become a great man? We learn also that the women of Noradin's kingdom "are very competitive" (avoient beaucoup d'émulation) (2:193). Are we to understand, then, that the ambassador is not a lone great man, but one of many great women? If so, Almoladin would have been disappointed in his wish to have only one of the little girl's kind. We sense the ghost of Idamée hovering over this scene. Perhaps de Gouges killed her off under one regime only to have her martyrized in the next.

De Gouges's feminism is defined by the limits of philosophic discourse.[126] For the philosophes, civilization was unthinkable without nature, which was both ontologically prior to and beneath it. Nature inevitably contained inequality, whether in the distribution of power between groups of "men" (the foundation of social class), or between men and women (the foundation of gender). The philosophes conceived relations among "men" in universalist terms, as for example in Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*. When a feminist like Olympe de Gouges demanded sexual equality for women, no longer subsumed under the universal "man," it looked like special pleading. Feminist demands could then be dismissed as marginal to the larger political demands of the Revolution.

126. I am grateful to Daniel Morris for making me think about the limits of de Gouges's feminist discourse.

Because of the discrepancy between the universalist equality among "men" and the particular equality of women, the Revolution of 1789 did not usher in a public discourse of social *and* sexual equality. Instead, there was an increasingly visible barrier between feminism and radical revolutionary politics. In general, revolutionary women (Madame Roland, Madame de Staël, Louise Robert de Kéralio) were not especially feminist, and the famous feminists of the time (Etta Palm d'Aelders, who was a prominent figure in the Cercle Social, and Théroigne de Méricourt) did not give their first allegiance to political radicalism.[127] The suppression of the Cercle Social in 1791 enacted politically the discursive split between feminism and the Revolution. The ill-fated Club des Citoyennes Républicaines Révolutionnaires, led by Pauline Léon and Claire Lacombe, in which feminist and political agitation coalesced to some degree, provoked the crackdown against women's clubs in 1793.

In appropriating philosophic "nature" as the basis of feminist claims, de Gouges and the feminists made common cause with the forces that defeated them, for of course antifeminists too appealed to nature in order to keep women in their place. The seventeenth-century cartésiennes offered a more consistent challenge to "nature" in uncoupling mind and sex, but they had to deny their sexuality in order to do so. Like Emilie du Châtelet, Olympe de Gouges wanted it all: mind and sexuality. In this sense, her feminism was much more radical than that of her predecessors. Inscribed in the philosophic discourse of nature, it was doomed to failure. Once nature is seen as the work of (masculine) civilization, the implications of her claims will be fully appreciated.

127. See Abray, "Feminism," 50–60. Candice Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution*, misses the complexity of the situation in her comment (46) that the celebrated female revolutionary leaders and feminists were all "revolutionaries first and women second."

Conclusion: Beyond the Ellipsis

Is Cartesian discourse dead? Luce Irigaray, who may possibly be the last of the Cartesian women, raises this question in a little essay on Descartes which forms the centerpiece to her *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974). Consciously and relentlessly she pursues throughout this long, difficult book on dominant Western philosophical discourse from Plato to Freud the problem in which Cartesian women of earlier times were unknowingly ensnared. What is the relation of women to a discourse that excludes them? For Irigaray, "specularization" best describes the functioning of a discourse that sees only the reflection of a masculine subject when it focuses on women. The location of the meditation on Descartes at the very center of the *Speculum*, as Toril Moi has pointed out, makes perfect sense, for the cogito in Irigaray's reading is the ultimate in self-reflection.[1] In the moment of the cogito, Descartes's "I" moves from the (masculine) singular to the universal and back again: "Everything can be put in doubt, (it is) I (who) doubt(s), therefore (it is) I (who) am. The relation to the universality of being of the thinking and speaking 'I' is then assured."[2]

Irigaray's dramatic staging of Western (masculine) discourse as self-representation leaves little in the way of satisfactory answers to those

1. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), 131. Toril Moi is speaking of the speculum-like structure of Irigaray's book rather than of the cogito here. She remarks that Irigaray centers on Descartes as "the rationalist theoretician of the body/mind split who still exercises a profound influence on French intellectual life."

2. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian G. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 181.

who have been left outside its circuit. The broad features of her feminist alternative form a primarily negative critique, much like that of the earlier Cartesian women. Her radical rethinking of the cogito and of Cartesian dualism sounds uncanny echoes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She leaves no doubt, however, that we've entered a new chapter of discursive history.

The title of her essay on Descartes is a decontextualized quotation from the Fifth Discourse of Descartes's *Optics* (one of the three treatises that the *Discourse on Method* prefaced): ". . . And If, Taking the Eye of a Man Recently Dead, . . ." Descartes is issuing instructions for an experiment that will confirm for his reader the validity of his account of human vision. If you perform the following experiment, he says, "you will be even more certain" (AT 6:114–15). Now it is just this kind of certainty that Irigaray wants to deconstruct. Given her project to expose the exclusion of the feminine from Western philosophical discourse, we cannot help but suspect that the cadaver of her experiment is Descartes himself. Moreover, a constant oscillation in her essay between the "mind's eye" and the subject pronoun "I" facilitates the word play eye/I in the English translation and suggests that the demise that she rescripts proclaims the death of the subject of discourse. What does the title's initial ellipsis replace if not Descartes's own perspective or vision?

When read against the *Optics*, the initial ellipsis announces a break with Descartes's faith in the power of objective experimentation to achieve certain truth. Yet the hypothetical, experimental "and if" of Irigaray's title betrays a continuity with Cartesian discourse. Isn't it precisely her methodical doubt that makes her a good Cartesian? With this ambivalence Irigaray locates herself (ambivalently) in the tradition of the Cartesian women. Her contradictory position serves to demonstrate that with the recent renewal of the feminist alternative, old issues have not even had a chance to bow out before new ones have appeared on the scene. Alice Jardine may have been overly optimistic in her view that "once traditional conceptions of the speaking subject and language have been rejected . . . the real problems begin."[3] Traditional conceptions have a way of lingering on into the beginnings of real problems.

Irigaray deliberately suppresses the subject of discourse by the choice of her titular fragment. We have no idea *who* takes the eye. The

3. Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 45.

ellipses leave the choice of discursive subject open. In Descartes's *Optics*, the man who will perform the experiment is addressed by the philosopher, who instructs him as "vous." The second-person pronoun should not deceive us, for, as Irigary takes pains to show, "you" and "I" are one in the philosopher's universalizing first person singular. Her title's ellipses subvert the universal mirror-imaging of the masculine subject by their silent exhortation to displace it. The writer is an example here, filling in the blanks with her own "eye" as she explores the implications of Cartesian dualism for the excluded feminine. Speaking now in her own voice, now in Descartes's, she sees (for?) (with?) the dead man. Substitution and/or identification? Does she write a new feminist alternative, an infinite potentiality of non-universal "eyes," gendered and socially located, or does she simply rewrite the masculine as feminine, resuscitating the dead man as the universal feminine?

Let's not forget the cadaver. This "man recently dead" is also an object. In taking his "eye," Irigaray revives him as subject of the discourse. Isn't his eye much like that of de Scudéry's chameleon, in the double position of object of the experimental discourse and fellow-subject of the experimenter? Yet since it is also *Descartes's* eye that is at issue here, we realize that Irigaray has turned the tables on the philosopher, putting *him* in the position of object by making him the object of her ironic discursive mimicry. Her open-ended, tentative, "and if" prevents her, in taking his eye, from adopting his dualistic gaze and severing body (the cadaver) from mind (the mind's eye). It alerts her to the dangers, perceived long ago by Elisabeth of Bohemia, of an "ascetic ellipsis of the body," a "strict deprivation of all exercises of the sensibility and the imagination" (185). In tentatively taking Descartes's "I," letting us imagine by her ellipses that she is ready to relinquish it to another, Irigaray the psychoanalyst momentarily identifies with and re-places Descartes, abandoning the descriptive "he," which takes her midway through her essay, for the mimetic "I." This strategy destabilizes the universal masculine subject of the cogito and shakes the foundations of Cartesian knowledge.

Irigaray's seventeenth-century predecessors were half in love with the logocentrism that she defies because it offered them an escape from imprisonment in their bodies. To think was to be ungendered. By the eighteenth century, dualism had worn out its welcome for women who had gained no significant recognition as thinking subjects. Women such as Emilie du Châtelet and Olympe de Gouges wanted equality in difference, but the only discourse they possessed

for laying claim to it was one that in the name of nature either denied difference altogether or made it an insuperable barrier to equality.

It has taken late twentieth-century feminism and postmodern disenchantment with the Enlightenment to expose the extent to which the dominant discourse of the West appropriates the language of subordinate groups. By the close of the eighteenth century, the main features of the feminist alternative were massively absorbed into rational discourse. The self-consciousness of the thinking subject, its empathic bond with the object of knowledge, and the concern to unite moral value with scientific inquiry were transformed into "sentiment." Ultimately, the irrational became a convenient rug under which to sweep the contestation of objectivity and value-neutrality.

It is perhaps unwittingly that Irigaray takes the "eye" of the Cartesian women in this book. As wary of objectivism as they, but more emphatic in her critique of dualism, more profoundly suspicious of the rationalist bias, she dances around new discursive alternatives. Between Irigaray and her predecessors lies a long historical process, the contours of which have recently come into focus. We have only now begun to unravel what the early Cartesian women helped to construct: a (masculine) universalist discourse that ultimately excluded them. Irigaray's consciousness of universalism's tyrannies, of its insecurity as a foundation for the knowledge that is needed now, is what drives her deconstructive project and what separates her from her foremothers.

Does the moment of rupture marked by the initial ellipsis of Irigaray's title put Descartes definitively in the newly revised curriculum's dustbin of "dead white men"? With the debates surrounding this formulation, no matter what the fate of the curriculum, the American university approaching the year 2000 serves notice that the old discursive paradigm is in trouble. We may read Irigaray's second ellipsis not simply as an omission but as a path to a future of possible alternatives, constructed this time not just with the help of women, but by women and all others who have been relegated to the margins.

How to contest the rationalist bias from within rational discourse is still a major dilemma for today's "Cartesian women." Even Irigaray, who would like to refuse the terms of the discourse, cannot cast methodical doubt totally aside and, more important, cannot simply forget about Descartes.[4] Walking out and slamming the door on the

4. Toril Moi argues that Irigaray becomes entrapped in patriarchal discourse even while attempting to evade it. See *Sexual/Textual Politics*, 140–47.

old paradigm is not a viable option. At our most inventive, there is necessarily something of the *bricoleuse* in us. We inevitably gather bits and pieces of the old when we make something new, which by and by will overlay memory of the previous form. No one can be sure, now, what the something new will be. But we have started to think about what lies beyond the ellipsis.

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